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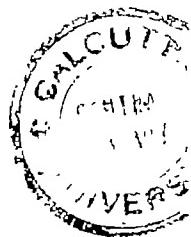
BULLETIN  
OF  
THE DEPARTMENT  
OF  
ENGLISH

*Wordsworth Number*



CALCUTTA UNIVERSITY

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## CONTENTS

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RECENT TRENDS OF WORDSWORTH CRITICISM	...	...	1
S. K. Das			
THE POETRY OF CONTEMPLATION	...	...	23
Kitty S. Datta			
RANDOM THOUGHTS ON WORDSWORTH	...	...	34
S. C. Sen			
WORDSWORTH IN LIGHTER VEINS	...	...	41
K. Lahiri			

## OUR CONTRIBUTORS

S. K. DAS, M.A., D.Phil. (Cal), part time lecturer in the Department of English, Calcutta University, wrote his thesis on Wordsworth's concept of imagination.

KITTY S. DATTA, M.A. (Edin), D.Phil. (Oxon), author of *Natural Magic*, a study of Elizabethan poetry, is a part time lecturer in the Department of English, Calcutta University.

S. C. SEN, M.A., Ph.D. (Cal), M. Litt. (Cantab), for a long time a teacher in the Department of English, Calcutta University, has recently retired as Professor of English, Visva Bharati University.

K. LAHIRI, Reader, Department of English, Calcutta University.

# RECENT TRENDS OF WORDSWORTH CRITICISM

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S. K. DAS

## I

THE purpose of this essay is to provide a plan or pattern for the reading of the principal texts of Wordsworth criticism between 1950 and 1970. Wordsworth criticism before 1950 has been reviewed carefully and judiciously in *The English Romantic Poets* (ed. T. M. Raysor, The Modern Language Association of America, N. Y., 1956), the *Cornell Wordsworth Collection: A Catalogue* (ed. G.H. Healey, Ithaca : Cornell, 1957) and in the *Wordsworthian Criticism: A Guide and Bibliography* (J. V. Logan, Columbus : Ohio State, 1947). They provide the reader with the necessary guidelines about the historical development of attitudes towards Wordsworth. But the three bibliographies mentioned above have not been revised and brought up to date. The original author of the article on Wordsworth in *The English Romantic Poets* was Ernest Bernbaum; but he was unable to continue the project because of his illness and his article stands as it was in the first edition except for a few additions made by J.V. Logan. Logan's *Wordsworthian Criticism* may still be considered useful for it lists 661 editions and critical works on the poet published between 1849 and 1944. More recently E. F. Henley and D. H. Stam have jointly edited *Wordsworthian Criticism* (N. Y., 1965) which lists a few more recent books on Wordsworth. As far as I know, this is the latest attempt at offering the reader something like a brief compendium of books on Wordsworth. All books published on Wordsworth after 1960 have not been mentioned here, but this is quite understandable; what is rather disappointing for the reader is that the annotations are very brief. As such they are not very helpful to the reader who wants to select, and there is such an abundance of material on the subject that the problem of selection is unavoidable. The yearly crop of riotous growth shows no signs of a diminishing harvest and during the last ten years there has been considerable addition to Wordsworth criticism. The territory to be surveyed is so terrifying and extensive that only books and articles that have been published after 1950 and which are of more than ephemeral interest to readers will be discussed in this essay. I shall, therefore, avoid an arid listing of names.

Much better texts of Wordsworth's poems have been provided in recent

years. For ordinary purposes the one-volume Hutchinson edition (O.U.P.) is still the most satisfactory. The five-volume works of Wordsworth edited by Selincourt and Helen Darbishire is a monument of scholarship and for serious readers this remains still the most dependable work. *The Prelude* edited by Ernest de Selincourt has been reissued with revisions by Helen Darbishire. Paul M. Zall's *Literary Criticism of William Wordsworth* (Lincoln, 1966) provides a better text with annotations and it supplements the works of Grosart, Knight and N. C. Smith. Zall prints the earliest rather than the latest versions of the various documents published by Wordsworth. Professor J. W. Smyser and O. J. B. Owen are at present busy editing Wordsworth's prose works for the Clarendon Press; they think that no currently available text of Wordsworth's prose works is considered wholly accurate.

No edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* giving all the poems in both volumes has appeared since those of Sampson (1903) and Littledale (1924). The new edition presenting the text as it appeared in 1798 and 1800, together with the variant readings of 1802 and 1805 prepared by R. L. Brett and A.R. Jones (Methuen, 1963) is likely to prove very useful to readers. All relevant materials have been admirably summarised by the editors in their introduction and notes. Some contemporary reactions to the first appearance of the poems are also given in an appendix. Another notable feature of this edition is the scholarly correlation of the different versions of the Preface. Teachers of English literature may have felt the need for such a volume and this be found useful for many years to come.

A curious product of modern research is *The Early Wordsworthian Milieu* (O.U.P., 1958). To the page by page type reproduction of a short notebook of Christopher Wordsworth, the poet's younger brother, Z. S. Fink adds an introductory essay. It presents a complete and carefully annotated text of a hitherto unknown notebook, in which William at the age of fourteen or so entered five bits of prose writing which he probably intended to versify. The notebook comprises some twenty pages and the entries divide into two sections. The first section, of about five pages, is in the poet's handwriting. Evidence in *The Prelude* and elsewhere confirms that it is connected with the earliest period of his poetic activity. The entries in the second section are all by Christopher. There is an interesting note on Wordsworth's projected Latin poem in the Lake District. Christopher and William had much affinity and the editor finds many parallels between these notes and Wordsworth's poems. But it is not a question of Wordsworth borrowing from Christopher or vice versa but of common literary milieu, a milieu embracing various things. The chief purpose of this study is to remind

us to what extent the Wordsworthian synthesis made use of materials "at hand and often conventional." (p.57)

Poets are usually known by the best versions of their works; Wordsworth is often known by the worst. The bulk of Wordsworth's work is still read in reprints of the last edition of his lifetime. Most poems lose by this; but none loses more than *The Ruined Cottage*. This is the contention of Jonathan Wordsworth in *The Music of Humanity* (Nelson, London, 1969). Written in 1797-98 *The Ruined Cottage* was revised several times before being published as Book I of *The Excursion* in 1814. Between January and March 1798, Wordsworth more than doubled the length of the poem, the bulk of his additions consisting of a life history of the Pedlar who tells the main story. The author argues that the two phases of composition produce poetry of radically different kinds. The original poem anticipates *Michael*, the additions reflect *The Prelude*. In the first extant manuscript of the completed poem Wordsworth is said to have decided to separate the two halves. They were later combined and it is impossible to say how long they remained separate in the poet's own mind. Both parts, however, benefit from being considered in isolation and it is this double version that Jonathan Wordsworth has given us. Much emphasis has been laid in this book not only on Wordsworth's technical development but on the extent to which his changing views show the influence of Coleridge. Yet, for all this, there is a consistent and continuing Wordsworth, whose values are unchanged and whose individuality is felt as much in the second part (*The Pedlar*) as in the first (*The Ruined Cottage*).

Apart from this almost apostolic succession of editions, with their concomitants of emendation and illustrative material, recent scholarship has produced editions of the journals and letters of the poet, his sister and his wife. The Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth have been edited by Helen Darbishire (The World's Classics, 1958) with an introduction and footnotes and an appendix of shorter poems. The volume combines *The Alfoxden Journal* from Knight and *The Grasmere Journal* from the manuscript at Dove Cottage. The introduction gives a general account of the circumstances in which the journals were written and an appreciation of Dorothy. Philip Wayne's *Letters of William Wordsworth* (World's Classics, 1954) obviously refers to Selincourt's monumental work in six volumes, but he gives us ample material to follow the major events in the poet's life and to realize his sincerity, modesty, sense of the ridiculous, his toughness and nobility. In recent years Selincourt's edition of *The Early Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth* has been revised by C. L. Shaver (1967). The letters are, however, to be supplemented by Kathleen Coburn's edition of *The Letters of Sarah Hutchinson from 1800 to 1835*.

(Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1954). She provides us with one of the most intimate pictures we have of the great circle. In addition they rectify the somewhat-acid accounts of her given by Hartley and explain why Sarah became so important a member of the Wordsworth family.

Another important member of the circle was Mary who has been overshadowed rather than overlooked in the work of the scholars. Her memoirs and her journal of the 1820 tour were not published till Mary E. Burton edited 178 of the approximately 200 extant letters of Mary Wordsworth (*Letters of Mary Wordsworth*, O. U. P., 1958). Although little has been written of Mary during the early years of their marriage, references to her in Wordsworth's poems are more numerous than one would think. However, we cannot accept Burton's view that Lucy was a composite of Mary and her sister Margaret. Nor can we agree with her over-estimation of the probable influence of Mary on Wordsworth's literary development. She says that with the marriage of the poet, now thirty-two years old, begins the period that produced *The Prelude*, the famous *Immortality Ode*, many of the great sonnets, and *The Excursion*. This is not altogether accurate. *The Prelude* dates from 1798-99; the *Immortality Ode* was begun six months before the marriage; the first of the great sonnets antedate the wedding as does the conception of the philosophical poem of which *The Excursion* was a part. Actually Wordsworth wrote almost nothing of importance for fifteen months after marriage. The value of Mary Burton's book, however, lies in the intimate picture it gives us of the poet's household from 1820 to 1850. The letters reveal that she was quietly aware of her strength and never admitted an inferiority to any of the members of the Wordsworth circle. She was deeply sympathetic, had an independent mind and was severely critical of those who earned her disapproval. Nothing in this volume informs us of the "phantom of delight" that surprised Wordsworth. But there was in her much of the "angelic light" and nowhere does it shine more brilliantly than in the last letter that Burton chooses for her book. Writing to Susan Wordsworth thirteen days after Dorothy's death, Mary declares: "This being a bright morning, I feel a desire to tell you and dear Chris: with my own Pen, that notwithstanding the void that must henceforth remain at my heart, I shall never feel thankful for the Almighty's goodness for having spared me to be the solitary lingerer, rather than the beloved sufferer now laid at rest and whose restless spirit I humbly trust is now among the Blessed, in the bosom of her heavenly Father."

Interest in the journals of the members of the Wordsworth circle has produced another important work. Collette Clarke's *Home at Grasmere*

(Penguin, 1959) is a novel attempt at collating Dorothy's journals with her brother's poems. Indeed the relation between the journals and the poems is so close that in most cases the problem of original invention remains unsolved. The study is of necessity selective and where the reference is casual and the poem long or remote, it has been omitted. Opposite the journal entry of 9 March 1802, *The Ruined Cottage* is printed in its original form, although the poem referred to in the journals was probably closer to the first book of *The Excursion* as we have it now.

The interest in the letters and journals is as strong today as it was during the early years of Wordsworthian scholarship. De Quincey's letters to Wordsworth and his family have been edited by John E. Jordan (*De Quincey to Wordsworth: Biography of a Relationship*, California Univ. Press, 1962). The replies have not been included, but the stages of their acquaintance have each been introduced by biographical chapters which fill in the gaps and supply many details of the largely unsatisfactory relationship. De Quincey's hopes of establishing a friendship on something like equal terms were shattered. His first visit to Grasmere in 1807 was not successful, although he was admitted to a large degree of intimacy with the Wordsworth family. It is interesting to see that De Quincey's letters were subsequently addressed more often to Dorothy than to William and were ingratiating in tone. In one of those letters De Quincey gives a graphic description of the Drury Lane fire in 1809. De Quincey's failure to see the *Convention of Cintra* through the press produced a cooling in Wordsworth's attitude to him. The chief causes, however, were De Quincey's addiction to opium and the circumstances of his marriage. This developments alienated Dorothy and Sarah Hutchinson and produced corresponding reactions from De Quincey himself. Although Wordsworth helped De Quincey to the editorship of *The Westmoreland Gazette* in 1818, the breach was never properly healed. De Quincey's revelations in the *Tait's Magazine* in which he "took a sort of public vengeance" on Wordsworth made it complete, but their correspondence had already ceased.

A new trend of recent studies on Wordsworth is the preoccupation with the chronology of the poet's work. M. L. Reed writes: "If a full-scale chronology is desirable for any English Author, Wordsworth's claim to such treatment is proportionately large." (*Wordsworth: The Chronology of the Early Years 1770-1799*, Harvard Univ. Press, Cambridge, 1967). Two more volumes are in preparation. As Reed points out, the problem of preparing such a work is twofold. First, there is the problem posed by the dearth of primary facts about certain periods, and secondly, there is the problem resulting from the wealth of general

comment and speculation. Reed bases his conclusions on the degree and quality of documentation available, rather than on the attractiveness of the theory proposed. He carefully weighs the evidences and sifts his material. The value of such a work that provides a readily accessible compendium of fact and theory about Wordsworth's life is sufficiently obvious.

## II

Wordsworth's poetry has found a large number of critics and interpreters, but it does not appear that his biography is in any danger of being overlooked or attracting less attention than it did in the past. It was habitual with Wordsworth to review and revise his emotions, thoughts and utterances. He was always trying to reach a clearer vision of the whole truth and its most perfect expression. Such an organic-creative nature cannot be easily interpreted. A poet's life is not reducible barely to facts and clearcut systematic divisions. Good biography remains a difficult art demanding vision and judgment. Two biographies in recent years may be said to have achieved this. Helen Darbishire's *Wordsworth* (British Council Pamphlet, 1953) brings out the "rootedness", the Northern quality of sternness, toughness and austerity in the poet's character which, however, did not overshadow his passionate tenderness for friends and family. She stresses the passion and power of Wordsworth's observation and uses *The Leech Gatherer* as providing the characteristic approach to his poetry. She does not analyse the mystical experiences of *The Prelude*; she emphasizes rather the practical implications of his vision, which makes *The Excursion* a great ethical poem. Darbishire also notes the poet's leaning towards Christianity, but there is no equivalent poetic rendering of his religious faith. Mary Moorman's biography of the poet (*William Wordsworth*, 2 vols, Oxford, 1957 & 1965) is authoritative and it seeks to correct the distortions caused by too much speculation and theory. In recent years Wordsworth's biography has been written by what may be described as the psycho-analytical school of writers. Modern psychological knowledge is a useful aid to human studies of any kind, but psychological evidence is only one kind of evidence among many. It can be easily misinterpreted and biography can be reduced to an analyst's case-book. Moorman has avoided the psycho-analytic approach; she has assembled all the available evidence and has tried to establish the relative importance of facts, surmises and possibilities with which she has to deal. *The Prelude* forms, naturally, the basis of her account and she accepts it fully, maintaining that although Wordsworth sometimes telescoped events, he never

invented material for the poem. Her task has been to discover the correct sequence, for her view is that Wordsworth was often guilty of chronological inexactitude. Moorman has also made full use of the letters, journals, tabletalks, and poems. She cannot claim to have discovered many new facts about Wordsworth, but the function of research is not the discovery of startling facts. The terrain of Wordsworth's biography still contains some unexplored areas such as what he did in Paris in 1792 and whether he returned to Paris in 1793. Moorman's most important new discovery is Wordsworth's acquaintance with Godwin in 1795, revealed in Godwin's diaries. She has also thrown new light on the poet's school days, on the Racedown and Alfoxden periods and on his winter sojourn in Germany. Her analysis of Wordsworth's recovery from the Annette affair is particularly illuminating. As a biographer her interest in the poems chiefly concerns such problems as the date and the circumstances of their composition, or points of interpretation having a bearing on the poet's life. She has not imposed a particular point of view but by setting down everything that is known or has been suggested, she has admirably served the interests of the students of Wordsworth's life and poetry. Wordsworth's later poetry according to Moorman is of high artistic merit and very little of it is entirely commonplace or dull, a view which Edith Batho and B. Groom have been trying to establish. She rejects the image of Wordsworth in later life as a morose and intolerably conceited recluse. Wordsworth according to her was a faithful and affectionate friend, the devoted though overanxious brother, father and husband, a kind host, the sage of Rydal and the man of letters whose conversation younger men loved to listen to. Moorman's poet has few literary prejudices and he appears as the champion of compassion and humanity. She says, however, that Wordsworth's memories of the French Revolution and the Jacobin terror never ceased to haunt him, and he often looked back too much to the happier world of his own youth. Knight's biography has been imperceptive; the Bishop of Lincoln's *Memoirs* is partial and protective and is hardly integrated into any literary form; Harper is hag-ridden by the distinction between the early Wordsworth, who was a liberal and wrote great poetry and the later Wordsworth, who developed all the wrong political ideas and wrote badly. Moorman's biography is fair and the students of Wordsworth have been placed immeasurably in her debt.

Annette Vallon has often been cited as the Venus Pandemus of Wordsworth's life and the episode has often been regarded as the most decisive influence on Wordsworth's literary career. This view, however, has been exploded thoroughly by C. H. Patton (*The Rediscovery of Wordsworth*, pp.

202-216), R. D. Havens (*The Mind of a Poet*, 2 vols, Baltimore, 1941, pp. 508-513), W. L. Sperry (*Wordsworth's Anti-Climax*, Harvard Univ. Press, 1935), and A.L. Stout ("Wordsworth's Desiccation", MLR. 1940). None of these writers accepts the extreme accusations of G. McLean Harper, E.H. Legouis, Herbert Read and Hugh I'A. Fausset.

Continuing interest in the two great figures of Romantic Poetry is typified by H.M. Margoliouth's book *Wordsworth and Coleridge* (O.U.P., 1953) on the personal and literary relationship between Wordsworth and Coleridge from their first meeting until Coleridge's death. The work is mainly biographical and it is useful to have the story of what each was doing year by year clearly laid out. There is also an account of the influence of Dorothy, but there is no exaggeration. Margoliouth speaks of her 'unspotted' love and friendship for Wordsworth, and adds that Dorothy loved Coleridge, but was not in love with him. Coleridge's marriage failed not because of her or Sarah Hutchinson, but because his wife was unsympathetic. Lucy, according to Margoliouth, was Margaret Hutchinson who died of consumption in 1796 and the *Immortality Ode* originated from a conflict between Wordsworth the celibate devoted to poetry and Wordsworth the betrothed man. He gives an account of the development and revisions of such poems as *Christabel*, the *Dejection Ode* and *The Recluse*. The story of their gradual alienation makes sad reading, but it was unavoidable since Coleridge's return from Malta a greatly changed individual. Marriage had also brought changes in the Wordsworth family and both in the end failed each other.

### III

It is difficult to clarify the main tendencies in the huge mass of Wordsworth criticism. Now it may be relevant here to refer to those studies which are mainly concerned with his ideas and to postpone the consideration of those mainly concerned with the aesthetics of his work. Beatty's work on Wordsworth's doctrine and art (Madison, 1928) neglected the religious and metaphysical implications which Hartley attached to what would otherwise have been a purely rationalistic psychology. This deficiency in Beatty's admirable pioneering work has been supplied by recent scholars like M. Rader and N. P. Stallknecht. Rader's revised version, *Wordsworth: A Philosophical Approach* (Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1967) examines the fundamental ideas underlying Wordsworth's poetry, relating his thought to the visissitudes of his life, to the influence of his friendship with Coleridge, and to the major traditions of philosophy. Rader focuses almost exclusively on the poetry written from 1797 to 1807. He traces the

internal coherence in the total body of this work, demonstrating its philosophical sources and affinities. Indirectly Rader seeks to refute Bateson's implication of a sharp dualism of head and heart in Wordsworth's poetry. Wordsworth may have been primarily a feeler, but his feelings were deeply interfused with thought. Wordsworth's doctrines may be said to have played a major role in the development of romanticism and cannot be neglected by the historian of ideas. Dissatisfied with a dualistic metaphysics, Wordsworth softened its traditional sharp distinction between appearance and reality, mind and matter, body and soul. He was convinced that analytical reason is inadequate to portray the integrality and flow of experience. His poetry answers the need of the human spirit. Rader's view is also different from the extreme views of Legouis and Harper, who maintain that Wordsworth is intellectually a son of Rousseau and a disciple of Hartley. My interpretation is that Wordsworth was a bold thinker gathering ideas from many sources and adapting them freely to his own purposes. He was never the slave of a particular philosophy; he was far too great to be enslaved by any doctrine.

Reacting against the somewhat narrow interpretation of Wordsworth presented by Beatty, N. P. Stallknecht comes to the conclusion that Wordsworth was influenced by various other thinkers like Plotinus, Bruno, Spinoza, Boehme, and Kant. Stallknecht finds Jacob Boehme a more significant figure than Spinoza in Wordsworth's poetry. The first edition of the book has been revised and the new edition (*Strange Seas of Thought*, Bloomington, 1958) records a few changes. He newly recognizes the relevance of the Roman stoicism to the understanding of the philosophical pattern of the ideas in *Ode to Duty* and in *The Excursion*. These two works have been thought to reflect the moral philosophy of Kant, centred on a doctrine of duty or rational obligation. References to Seneca had been thought to be merely casual. Stallknecht maintains that Wordsworth's philosophy of Duty was no mere revival of ancient stoicism, but showed noticeable developments. Although the concept of an active principle is central to such works as Cicero's *De Natura Decorum*, Wordsworth's idea had much more in common with Shaftesbury. Stallknecht has also shown that it is not philosophically or scientifically preposterous to base one's reflections about life upon individual experiences and to draw from them idealistic conclusions concerning man's relationship to the universe. A. N. Whitehead had maintained that position 45 years ago (*Science and the Modern World*, Chapter 5); but Stallknecht restates the case with much fuller evidence and elaborate reasonings. Another important point stressed is that Wordsworth's belief concerning the creative imagination involves assumptions which depend upon religious faith, partly exemplified

by Boehme. His assertion that Wordsworth was directly influenced by Boehme's ideas is, however, untenable.

The chronological closeness of the *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) and the *Ideen zu einer Philosophie der Natur* (1797) by Schelling indicates an astonishing spiritual closeness between Wordsworth and Schelling. The near congruence of the two dates, 1797 and 1798 may not prove the existence of a homogenous *Zeitgeist*, but the similarity of the two writers does lend force to the view that romanticism is a meaningful historical term, a view which Wellek has defended against Lovejoy's discrimination of romanticisms. (*PMLA*, 1924, pp. 229-53; *Comparative lit.*, 1949, pp. 1-23, 147-72). The similarities cannot be explained by positing an influence of Schelling on Wordsworth, but this is what E. D. Hirsch does in his book, *Wordsworth and Schelling* (New Haven, 1960). As to direct influence Wordsworth knew too little German to have a firsthand acquaintance with Schelling. In his later life he was content to announce that he had "never read a word of German metaphysics, thank heaven" (*Correspondence of Crabb Robinson*, ed. Morley, Oxford, 1927, Vol I, p. 401). Although Wordsworth read Kant, Schelling and Fichte in later life (round about 1844) it is reasonable to assume that Schelling's ideas did not influence Wordsworth's fundamental attitudes. They may have developed independently an identical *Weltanschauung*. Hirsch's approach is what descriptive psychology describes as 'typification'. He attempts not to describe a species of romanticism but to construct a type of romantic outlook. Such a type may function as a leading idea, which allows the students to examine minutely an individual mind in all its complexity without losing sight of the whole. His discussion of the *Immortality Ode* (chapter 7) demonstrates that a typological study used flexibly can be helpful in penetrating textual meaning. He has, however, succeeded in avoiding the danger that one may come to see only the type in every text so that the latter becomes merely an illustrative document.

The preoccupation with the ideas behind Wordsworth's poetry has led to an examination of the importance of Unitarianism in Wordsworth's and Coleridge's thought. H. W. Piper in *The Active Universe* (London, 1962) traces the displacement of the Newtonian system by activist concepts of the universe. The author discusses Coleridge's modest beginnings in *Religious Musings* and *The Destiny of Nations*. The influences of Priestley and Darwin on Coleridge have been emphasized. The early history of Wordsworth's thought is vague, since *The Prelude* is unreliable on this point. But there are evidences that his unitarian contacts had led him to formulate ideas not dissimilar to Coleridge's before his move to Alfoxden. He also discovers what he claims to be new contemporary sources of

Wordsworth's pantheism, and incidentally traces the influence of *The Excursion* in Byron, Shelley and Keats.

The political ideal of the poet has also been recently discussed in a study *Politics and the Poet* (Methuen, 1958) by F. M. Todd. He tries to show that the poet's change did not indicate a betrayal of his early ideals. On the contrary they imply a fuller realization of their significance brought about by the political experience in England and America. Todd brings together a mass of evidence, some familiar, others less known, to reveal the stages by which Wordsworth came to regard the war against Napoleon as England's supreme test of greatness. Wordsworth's slow transition from radical to Tory positions, his attitude to the Whigs and his long-lasting reservations about the Tories have never before been set forth with such clarity, particularization and careful analysis. After his brother's death the need for fortitude in bereavement led him away from political reform to a new egalitarianism of the spirit by which the sources of real happiness could be explored. Todd tells us that Wordsworth opposed the Reform Bill not from blind reaction but from reasoned doubts; and when his fears proved baseless his opposition ceased. To readers of Wordsworth's biography the merit of this book lies in its presentation of relevant material and events in their contemporary significance.

#### IV

It is perplexing to find that critics widely divergent from one another in temperament should all be interested in the same poet and consider Wordsworth worthy of sustained and serious study. The realists have probably overemphasized the objective elements ; and the mystics, the subjective. Taken together, however, they bear witness to the extraordinary scope and variety of Wordsworth's poetry. We may now begin our reconnaissance of the sacred wood with F.W. Bateson's *Wordsworth: A Re-interpretation* (1954; revised 1963). Bateson's whole thesis rests on J. K. Stephen's parody of Wordsworth. He perceives 'two voices', the Augustan realistic objective poetry of the ballad and the narrative class, and the subjective reflective Romantic type. The best poetry occurs when the two voices meet. However, Bateson laments they do not meet often because psychological disturbances kept breaking this balance splitting Wordsworth's personality. But this can be hardly acceptable for such a view reduces the poet to a sort of literary Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. It is a pity that a great deal of perceptive elucidation of many poems have been allowed to be overshadowed by dubious psychological assumptions. Bateson is illuminating about the shorter poems written before 1802, and the conflic-

ting social and religious pressures on the poet. He concludes that so far from surrendering to the neurotic elements in his personality, as so many romantic poets have done, Wordsworth's early life was one long struggle against them.

Thus Bateson states his case from a biographical and psychological approach, whereas John Jones (*The Egotistical Sublime*, London, 1954) develops his ideas through the aesthetic and philosophical medium. His construct is sounder and is based on the rejection of psycho-analytical methods. He traces with valuable comments on style three stages in the growth of the poet's mind, from a poetry of 'solitude and relationship' through a middle period of 'indecision' to the 'baptised imagination'. The first part of the scheme is worked out with delicate perception of Wordsworth's 'thought in sense'. The second reflects the dissociation of the poet's intellect and his vision, related to doubts about the nature of man and the self which result often in a sacrifice of the universal and the particular for the merely general. In the third stage Wordsworth can assent no longer to the literalness of the natural order and its moral-poetic power. He is trying to write transcendental poetry, to tell the tales of the invisible world. But the real value of Jones's book is independent of the thesis he offers. It is rich in perceptions of individual aspects of the poet's art. His examination of the 'reality-metaphors'—winds, echoes and water images—is a fine piece of literary criticism. Jones however, sees the loss of sensibility as due to a loss of gradual dulling of his mind brought to a climax by the sudden loss of his brother in 1805. This may be regarded as an oversimplification. Furthermore, he denies lyricism to Wordsworth, but can we entirely deny this?

More subtle but sometimes obscure interpretations are to be found in Geoffrey Hartman's book *The Unmediated Vision* (Yale Univ. Press, 1954). In a series of essays he links Wordsworth with Hopkins, Rilke, and Valery as examples of a peculiarly modern way of looking at life and art. He seeks to establish a special kind of approach directed towards complete interpretation. The final chapter "The New Perseus" is a discussion of the problem of the modern poet, understanding experience in its immediacy. Hartman's other book on Wordsworth (*Wordsworth's Poetry*, Yale Univ. Press, 1964) is a long dissertation on the role of nature as a negative force impeding the development of the poet. He argues that the growth of the poet's mind (he calls it 'maturation') was a matter of conflict between the influence of external nature and the stirring of his visionary imagination. There are many passages in the poems of Wordsworth to suggest that his "consciousness of self raised to apocalyptic pitch" momentarily overcame the compelling power of the outward scene. But

the vision falters and Wordsworth returns to the familiar. Hartman says that Wordsworth could have been a great poet but for this return to nature, this shrinking from the visionary subjects. The book has three divisions : In the first the thesis has been stated and is illustrated from *The Highland Reaper*, *There Was a Boy*, and *Tintern Abbey*. In the second its implications are discussed with reference to *The Prelude*. The last which is also the longest examines the great body of Wordsworth's poetry from *An Evening Walk* to *The Excursion* in the light of his thesis. His views have, however, been contradicted by Michael Irwin in "Wordsworth's Despondency Sublime" ( *EC*, 1964 ).

Wordsworth's role as a poet of nature has steadily diminished for many years. - J. F. Danby in his book *The Simple Wordsworth* ( Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960 ) emphasizes the subordinate role that external nature plays in Wordsworth's poetry. The basic concern of the poet is with the transactions that take place between the living person and the environment, which Danby calls 'dynamic Hartleyanism.' Danby occasionally introduces a degree of sophistication to Wordsworth criticism. *Simon Lee*, he says, reveals a 'delicacy of shift' ; the narrator in *The Thorn* is a device whereby the varying flow of our experience is controlled ; in the Gosler poems a great variety of poetic methods have been adopted ; and in the Matthew poems 'animal delight and animal decay are brought together'. Danby's other book on Wordsworth (*William Wordsworth : The Prelude and Other Poems*, Edward Arnold, 1963 ) is a brief introduction to the poet, written possibly with the idea of helping undergraduate students of English literature.

Colin Clarke's thesis *Romantic Paradox* ( Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962 ) is that as Wordsworth was preoccupied with the interaction between the mind and the senses, he showed a predilection not only for the word 'image' but also for the word 'form' and to a less extent the word 'shape'. He illustrates this by an examination of passages from *Tintern Abbey*, *The Prelude*, and the *Immortality Ode*. He also shows that the poet used these words equivocally and it was so because of his conviction that the natural world was solid and substantially other than the mind, and the mind had to come to terms with his conviction that what we perceive is inevitably mind-dependent. Thus Wordsworth's language in *The Prelude* and elsewhere embodies a more subtle play of the mind than is usually conceded.

The modern tendency is to find in Wordsworth's poetry a degree of complexity which eluded the earlier critics. Alec King ( *Wordsworth and the Artist's Vision*, London, 1966 ). King treats of Wordsworth's poetry as the poetry of vision. For him to see is an ambiguous word in Words-

worth's poetry. Sight, he points out, is at once a function of the bodily eye and the bodiless mind and so he traces the interaction between sight and insight in Wordsworth's poetry. Christopher Salvesen (*The Landscape of Memory*, Edward Arnold, 1965) shows that the working of memory make their first fully subjective appearance in English literature in the poetry of Wordsworth. They provide a useful and illuminating insight into some of his best poetry. Wordsworth's influence on Keats is also the subject of a study by Thora Balslev (*Keats and Wordsworth*, Copenhagen, 1962). It is chiefly aimed at detecting Wordsworthian echoes in Keats's poetry and by examining the variations between echo and source the author seeks to clarify the difference between the poets.

The characteristic Romantic uncertainty due to a loss of a sense of order in the universe and the need of the poet to replace it by a system of his own form the basis of a study by David Perkins (*The Quest for Permanence*, Harvard, 1959). Perkins cites three poets Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats as supplying three different resolutions of the anxieties created by the need for permanence. He explores Wordsworth's acute awareness of the distance between mankind and the rest of the creation—the isolation of the human mind which is not only the difference between brevity and permanence, but also between confusion and calm. He suggests that this isolation is represented by the solitaries and outcasts in his poetry and the children stand for man in the opposite situation. In his other book (*Wordsworth and Poetry of Sincerity*, Harvard, 1964) Perkins examines the feelings behind the poetry of Wordsworth. Poetry since Wordsworth reveals a continuing temptation to confuse sincerity with originality, and then originality with idiosyncrasy, as though one were most oneself by being most unlike other people. Sincerity can only exist by solidifying a moment in the flux of consciousness. It demands from the poet a special kind of tool for the expression of his ideas. The results are sometimes spectacular for they include the extreme elipsis of Hopkins, the country dialect, archaisms, neologisms and gawky compounds of Hardy, the obvious melodiousness of Swinburne, or the peculiarities of Cummings and Pound. Wordsworth's characteristic mode is incremental repetitions and the proliferation of conjunctions and prepositions. Wordsworth's sincerity as a poet is discussed in relation to his process of composition, the audience and the inadequacy of the language.

Interpreting the poet according to a formula that seems disquietingly neat is to be found in David Ferry's book, *The Limits of Mortality* (Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1959). Throughout his argument Ferry offers propositions that will startle most readers of Wordsworth. Yet this is an

interesting study. He points out admirably the ambivalence of Wordsworth's attitude towards Nature and hence towards man. 'The sacramentalists' view of Nature, in which Nature is regarded as the symbol of eternity, runs counter to the 'mystical' view in which Nature becomes an obstruction between the poet and his experience of the transcendental. His reading of Wordsworth's poetry culminates, appropriately, in a fine appraisal of the Snowdon scene in *The Prelude*, in which the sacramental and the mystical images of nature stand opposed to one another as emblems of the contest that rages in his imagination. In certain poems such as *To the Cuckoo* the two visions are brought into a perilous poise. Some poems present the contrast between the two views; in others they are fused. Lucy, for example, is both temporal and eternal and *A Slumber* is at the centre of the poet's art.

A handful of critics, notably Dicey, Burton and Batho have argued that Wordsworth underwent no basic change in his thinking; but this view has few adherents. Their works have value as correctives to some extreme views of Wordsworth's change of attitude but each of them employs special pleading, and to the extent that they do so, they vitiate their studies. W. L. Sperry in his book *Wordsworth's Anti-Climax* (revised edition, Russell & Russell, N. Y., 1966) corroborates Garrod's view that the last forty years of Wordsworth's life are the most dismal anti-climax of which the history of literature holds record. The work of the last thirty or forty years can be praised only at the expense of that of the eight or ten years after 1797. We do best, says Sperry, to trust the instinct which inclines us to the earlier work. However, the causes of this anti-climax are obscure and no single solution is convincing. Each is made plausible by ignoring stubborn facts which point in other directions. Wordsworth refuses to be neatly dissected in the critical laboratory. But the more clearly we understand the causes of his rise and fall as an artist, the deeper will be our insight into his best work. Chapter eight of Sperry's book summarises his views. But what he says about the poet's 'preposterous confidence in infancy' (p. 134) is not convincing enough. Sperry imputes the fall from the heights to the doctrinaire elements in Wordsworth's poetry. There is nothing new in this assertion, for this is not very different from Jeffrey's view (*The Edinburgh Review*, XXIV, p. 2). Sperry elaborates the view thus: "Wordsworth's decline was a foredoomed conclusion to his life as a poet, given his technical premises and the restricted subjects which were his patrimony from the earlier years of simple sensations and ideas." (p. 142)

Brief general introductions to the poet and his art are *Wordsworth* by Carl Woodring (Harvard, 1968) and *William Wordsworth* by Geoffrey

Durrant ( Cambridge Univ. Press, 1969 ). Woodring claims that much of what he says on Wordsworth is new. But it would not be unfair to say that it is a general critical introduction based on several earlier studies of the poet. He discusses the major poems and excludes the minor ones. But some of his observations are interesting. For instance, he says that Chatterton "trying to catch an easy market, invented the medieval poetry of Rowley and added to its meretricious interest by his own suicide." (p. 3) *The Vale of Esthwaite*, Woodring says, has a touch of the sentimentally erotic—the poor woman has swanlike breasts of snow. (p. 9) Wordsworth produced verse that he did well to keep in a cool dark place. (p. 11). The doctrinal poems of the *Lyrical Ballads* are "gnomic, pedagogic, mnemonic—'Thirty days hath September' raised to the *n*th power" (p. 40). Durrant's account is more balanced. He simply tries to see why Wordsworth is great. He sets out to show this clearly with detailed reference to particular poems. Professor Durrant reviews the great creative period of Wordsworth's life from 1798 to 1805. He examines representative poems in close details and builds up a cumulative sense of Wordsworth's preoccupations, showing how he employed his characteristic imagery and how relevant his poetry is to modern readers.

A refreshing departure from the scholarly and critical approach to Wordsworth's poetry is to be found in Russell Noyes's book *Wordsworth and the Art of Landscape* ( Indiana Univ. Press, 1968 ). The work is based on a direct study of original texts, landscape paintings, gardens and scenery. His purpose is to examine Wordsworth's principles and practices in the art of landscape in painting, gardening, travel and poetry, both as they relate to his eighteenth-century predecessors and as they are revealed in his work. Noyes analyses the art of landscape painting before Wordsworth and examines the ideas on the picturesque from Gilpin's writings. Some of Gilpin's ideas are similar to Wordsworth's. For instance Gilpin says : "Often when slumber has half-closed the eyes, and shut out all the objects of the sense, especially after the enjoyment of some splendid scene, the imagination active and alert, collects its scattered ideas, transposes, combines, and shifts them into a thousand forms, producing... exquisite scenes." ( *Three Essays on Picturesque Beauty*, 3rd edition, London, 1808, p. 54. Quoted by Noyes ). The preoccupation with the picturesque often produced satirical sketches in prose and verse. Noyes quotes from a satire on travel for the sake of seeing wild scenery :

I'll make a TOUR—and then I'll WRITE it

I'll parse it here, I'll verse it there

And picturesque it everywhere.

( Canto I, 122,127-28. *William Combe's The Tour of Dr. Syntax* )

Wordsworth, however, transcended the limitations of the picturesque and offered to the quickened sensibilities of his readers various, intimate and subtle interpretations of the natural world. As a schoolboy through his reading of the eighteenth century authors Wordsworth had become familiar with the tradition of poetical landscape description and of topographical poetry, which he turned to good account in *Evening Walk* and by the time he composed *Descriptive Sketches* he seems to have become well versed in the standards of taste in landscape painting and in the picturesque and the sublime. Noyes also traces the influence of George Beaumont, John Constable and John Turner on Wordsworth. A picturesque feature commonly found in paintings and used by Wordsworth was the addition of figures which harmonised with the general character of the landscape. In *An Evening Walk* the human and animal inhabitants, the shepherds and dogs, the muleteers and their trains, the peasant and his horse, all enhance the pastoral calm. Chapter five ("The Art of Landscape in Wordsworth's Poetry", pp. 198-250) points out the difference between the traditionalist and Wordsworthian approach to nature. Noyes shows that Wordsworth often chooses language that describes human condition and emotions and impregnates natural and inanimate objects with them. The study concludes with the assertion that Wordsworth may be given the highest place in the tradition of landscape poetry, the poetry of Homer, Virgil, Theocritus, Keats, Tennyson and Frost.

## V

Several studies on the poetry of the Romantics have appeared recently and all of them have devoted a considerable portion of their studies to Wordsworth's poetry. Harold Bloom's book on Romantic poetry (*The Visionary Company*, Faber & Faber, London, 1962) begins with an exposition of Blake's mythology and proceeds to trace Blake's themes through the major Romantic poets and some minor ones. Bloom observes that Blake and these poets can be read with profit in and each other's company, for their problems, themes, and resources are nearly the same. He compares Blake and Wordsworth, suggesting that the difference between them was that "Wordsworthian Man is Freudian Man, but Blake's Human Form Divine is not." However, he does not follow this scheme very closely, and the main portion of his book is devoted to analysis of some of the major Romantic poems. R. A. Foakes's study (*The Romantic Assertion*, Methuen, 1958) maintains that the twentieth century world is still the world of the Romantic in so far as it seems anarchic. The present age also offers no solutions to the problems in visions of cosmic harmony, but

deals with the resolution of contradictions within a strictly limited piece of experience. Foakes also refers to the modern critic's aversion to the long poem of the nineteenth century where images from the natural world were used as systems of symbols to convey a vision of spiritual order. He examines the two most recurring images—life as a journey in time and the image of love symbolizing higher union—from *The Prelude*, *The Eve of St. Agnes*, *In Memorium*, *Men & Women*, the poetry of Arnold and *The City of Dreadful Night* to show that whereas in the Romantics the vision becomes the reality and the real world fades, in the Victorians the world remains real and the vision becomes detached. The book may be regarded as a companion volume to Frank Kermode's book *Romantic Image* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961, reprinted from the 1957 version). The relevance of Foakes's title is found in his statement (p. 112) that "this poetry of assertion inevitably employs rhetoric in order to persuade us that the poet's vision is real, and to make us believe in its power and value." Foakes develops this point and argues that the "rhetoric of assertion is appropriate only to the true visionary utterance. ...But the rhetorical vocabulary used in the discussion of general problems now seems empty and barren, for it is unsupported by the central imagery or the central theme of the poem, and is not subsumed, as Tennyson wanted it to be, in a total vision." (pp. 137-38).

A very subjective, interesting, aggressive and sophisticated book on the Romantics is E. E. Bostetter's work, *The Romantic Ventriloquists* (Univ. of Washington Press, 1963). He substantiates his clear prejudice by considerable scholarship. Bostetter belongs to the tradition of I. Babbitt and H. N. Fairchild; in fact he is the last of the anti-Romantics. He argues that the Romantics were tempted too often to bridge discrepancies between the ideal and the real by mere poetry, by "consolatory magic, dreamy self-delusion and rationalization". They are always lying because they are always affirming. The Romantics are not prophets but ventriloquists who project their own voices as the voice of the ultimate truth.

Karl Kroeber in *The Artifice of Reality* (Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1964) isolates certain components of Romanticism, and seeks to reclaim for Romanticism, with these as its foundation, something of its former authority as an effective civilising agent. He cites the causes—the failure of a fixed social and political order, and the displacement of a mimetic by an expressive orientation in poetry—responsible for the seemingly compulsive tendency to generalize upon Romanticism. Some of his observations are already well known to readers of Romantic poetry. In the chapter entitled "The Temporization of Space" the author discusses *Tintern Abbey* and a series of poems by Leopardi—*The Infinite*, *To the Moon*, and

*Sunday Evening* to show how spatial configurations whose expansiveness may well tend to diminish our sense of human worth and accomplishment become psychologically manageable by being compounded with the purely mental forms of time. He points out that the departure from customary habits of perception and their replacement by special forms of cognition—dreams, visions and mystical illuminations—frequently seemed at variance with the poet's more prosaic obligations to his fellowmen. Kroéber seems to be too rigidly bound by his thesis. To speak of poems as contradictory as *Tintern Abbey* and *To the Moon* as much alike because of a similar use of creative memory or to lodge together such works as *To Silvia*, *Resolution and Independence*, *Eve of St. Agnes*, and *To Autumn* as equivalent examples of secular myth is to employ categories that are too broad.

Another recent study that considers some of the major Romantic poets as a group is Brian Wilkie's book *The Romantic Poets and Epic Tradition* ( Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1965 ). The similarities between the long poem in the Romantic era and its epic forbears have been, as Wilkie points out, rather neglected. He defines the epic tradition, avoids theoretical entanglements and establishes the major thesis that provides the basis for the critical discussions that follow. Four chapters form the bulk of the work ; each centres on a major work of Wordsworth (*The Prelude*), Shelley (*The Revolt of Islam*), Keats (*Hyperion*), and Byron (*Don Juan*). According to Wilkie *The Prelude* resembles the epic pattern of ordeal and progress and has a particular affinity to the great myth of primal innocence, fall, and regeneration. It is an epic of inner struggle culminating in a discovery ; the power of the consecrated soul is restored to gracious communion with itself and nature. The study is useful because it goes beyond the superficial devices of the epic convention and uncovers the broad pattern of design and movement that suggest meaningful analogies with the great epic themes of the past. He is less convincing when he attempts to interpret the powers of nature and books in Wordsworth's poem as epic machinery or to portray a choir of redbreasts and a glow-worm as epic omens.

## VI

One of the more interesting recent trends in the study of Wordsworth is an examination of his art from various approaches. Critics are increasingly being concerned with the study of his use of words, his images, his symbols, and his 'inscrutable' workmanship'. Helen Darbishire's *The Poet Wordsworth* (Oxford, revised 1962) and Lascelles Abercrombie's

*The Art of Wordsworth* (Oxford, London, 1952) have many discriminating remarks on style and manner. But there are more specialised studies than these. Florence Marsh's *Wordsworth's Imagery* (Yale Univ. Press, 1952) attempts a systematic exposition of Wordsworth's imagery. She concludes that the function of the image or metaphor in Wordsworth's poetry is neither complex nor startling. Marsh shows that the characteristics of individual metaphor or simile in Wordsworth's poetry are negative. Metaphors do not usually control the structure of Wordsworth's poem. It is not characteristic of Wordsworth to sustain a metaphor long or to use a metaphor or simile as an organic device. Wordsworth's theory of poetic diction has also been thoroughly investigated in B. Groom's *The Diction of Poetry from Spencer to Bridges* (Univ. of Toronto Press 1960) and in Josephine Miles's *Wordsworth and the Vocabulary of Emotion* (Octagon Books, N. Y., 1965. Revised.). Even some modern critics who are hostile to Wordsworth usually admit the soundness of his eagerness to recall poetry to its mission as a truthful interpreter of the meaning of life in unbookish diction by a selection of language really used by men. Roger Murray (*Wordsworth's Style*, Nebraska Univ. Press, 1967) examines some poems in the *Lyrical Ballads* in order to demonstrate how delicately Wordsworth's language responds at the level of grammar and diction to the pulse of feeling. He tries to show how the characteristic use of language reflects his insight into the life of things. For instance something of what Wordsworth meant by this expression is revealed by his use of intransitive verb. A. F. Potts in *Wordsworth's Prelude : A Study of its Literary Form* (Cornell Univ. Press, 1953) offers us an examination of its literary sources, antecedents and shaping forces. She traces in fourteen chapters the growth of the poem and of the poet's mind in relation to the poems that Wordsworth studied in school and in college. *The Prelude* is very like many markedly different English poems. In its lyric and idyllic character it is like Beattie's *Minstrel*, Thomson's *Castle of Indolence*, and Gray's *Bard*. When Wordsworth reshapes it into a nature ritual, it grows to be like Thomson's *Seasons*. When it reaches its apocalyptic episodes, it is akin to Young's *Night Thoughts*. Other works that may have shaped Wordsworth's poem are Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, Mark Akenside's *Pleasures of Imagination*, Pope's *Dunciad Book IV*, and Goldsmith's *Traveller*. Her analysis is, however, more than an enthusiastic source hunting. She establishes that the poem is culturally generic and not an isolated phenomenon. As the history of Wordsworth's literary heritage it remains unrivalled. Potts's more recent study, *The Elegiac Mode : Poetic Form in Wordsworth and Other Elegists* (Cornell, 1967) is not a history of elegiac literature. She makes a review of elegies and

similar meditative poems familiar to Wordsworth when he wrote the Lucy and Matthew poems. She has sought to distinguish genuine elegy from the mortuary idyll and lyric melancholia of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Then she proceeds to demonstrate that the Greek and Latin connotation of elegy can be illustrated from Wordsworth's writing to justify the classical perspective on the development of his style. Her conclusion is that it is quite justifiable to speak of Wordsworth and Yeats as elegiac poets with the same assurance with which we speak of Sophocles and Shakespeare as dramatic poets, and of Homer and Milton as epic poets.

The preoccupation with Wordsworth's style and form has produced another interesting study, Herbert Lindenberger's book on *The Prelude* (Princeton Univ. Press, 1963) built on the approaches of F.R. Leavis, William Empson, W. K. Wimsatt, and R. D. Havens among others. The work is 'a series of related essays, each design to approach the poem from a single direction.' The first three chapters deal with the language and style of the poem and examines 'the landscape of re-enactment' to suggest simultaneously physical fact and spiritual reality. He says that rhetorical strategies are at the heart of those great moments of spiritual discovery achieved through this interaction. It is a pity that Lindenberger has not provided a more satisfactory model of analysis than his concentration on fragments allows.

Among the miscellaneous works on the poet may be mentioned W. J. B. Owen's *Wordsworth as Critic* (Univ. of Toronto Press, 1969), an examination of the prose writings of the poet. Collection of important critical essays is a modern phenomenon, and there are a few on Wordsworth. Among the best may be mentioned *The Major English Romantic Poets* (ed. by C. D. Thorpe, C. Baker, and B. Weaver, Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1957), *English Romantic Poets* (ed. by M. H. Abrams, Galaxy Books, 1960), *Discussions of Wordsworth* (ed. by J. Davis, Boston, 1965), and *Wordsworth's Mind and Art* (ed. by A. W. Thomson, Oliver & Boyd, 1969). Nearly all of them contain fine appraisals of Wordsworth's poetry and his significance for the modern era.

GS 5862

There are innumerable short essays on Wordsworth published in journals and only those that are of more than ephemeral interest are listed below : S. C. Wilcox's "Wordsworth's River Duddon Sonnets" (*PMLA*, 1954); C. R. Woodring's "On Liberty in the Poetry of Wordsworth" (*PMLA*, 1955); F. A. Pottle's "The Eye on the Object in the Poetry of Wordsworth" (*Wordsworth Centenary Studies*, ed. G. T. Dunklin, 1951); J. R. Baird's "Wordsworth's Inscrutable Workmanship and the Emblems of Reality" (*PMLA*, 1953); William Empson's "Sense in *The Prelude*"

(KR, 1951); Stephen Parrish, "Wordsworth and Coleridge on Metre" (JEGP, 1960); G. H. Hartman, "Wordsworth's *Descriptive Sketches* and the Growth of the Poet's Mind" (PMLA, 1961); E. Morgan, "A Prelude to *The Prelude*" (EC, 1955); E. E. Bostetter, "Wordsworth's Dim and Perilous Way" (PMLA, 1956); W. J. B. Owen, "The Major Theme of Wordsworth's 1800 Preface" (EC, 1956); C. I. Patterson, "Meaning and Significance in *Peele Castle*" (JEGP, 1957); J. E. Jordan, "Wordsworth's Humor" (PMLA 1958); K. Maclean, "Levels of Imagination in Wordsworth's *Prelude*" (PQ, 1959); B. Garlitz, "The Immortality Ode: Its Cultural Progeny" (SEL, 1967); R. L. Schneider, "The Failure of Solitude" (JEGP, 1955); J. A. Finch, "The Ruined Cottage Restored" (JEGP, 1967); E. M. Conran, "The Dialectic of Experience" (PMLA, 1960); C. J. Smith, "The Effect of Shakespeare's Influence on *The Borderers*" (SP, 1953); Robert Langbaum, "The Evolution of Soul in Wordsworth's Poetry" (PMLA, 1967); J. A. W. Heffernan, "Wordsworth on Imagination" (PMLA, 1966); and Stephen Gill, "Wordsworth's Breeches Pocket: Attitude to the Didactic Poet" (EC, 1969).

The present short sketch endeavours in summary form to indicate the main tendencies and to relate them to larger movements of mind in the period covered. In conclusion it may be said that taken as a whole Wordsworth's criticism in the period under review is the best alike in range and insight and stimulus. As an aid to the appreciation of Wordsworth, it has no equal.

# THE POETRY OF CONTEMPLATION : SOME CONTINUITIES

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KITTY SCULAR DATTA

EVERY time of change tends to see previous times of change in its own image, so this may be why recent writing on the European Romantic movement has been laying particular stress on what we may call its apocalyptic element and its contemplative element. For in the contemporary life of western society these two strains are seeking new forms of expression in the general cult of the New : the apocalyptic strain presents images of a universe and a society completely re-made, with the stale and traditional abolished ; the contemplative strain presents a way of life which rises above what seem to be the purely materialistic concerns of modern society, pointing to the inward roots of human problems and revealing the richness of man's inner resources.

Wordsworth and Coleridge were in their own way concerned with the apocalyptic element in their confrontation with the French Revolution and its aftermath ; but they were also great contemplatives in a particularly modern style, and it is from this point of view that our discussion will regard them.

Essentially, the apocalyptic strain belongs to the life of contemplation rather than the life of action : it is a mode of vision which in prophesying the new life of the future also claims to uncover the base of present corruption, as the *Apocalypse* of St. John, the *Book of Revelation* does, setting the mythical pattern. Yet this strain has repeatedly led to action, as men strove in their own times to realise their vision of society made new. And repeatedly the failure to materialize the vision has been followed by a period of dashed hopes, self-criticism, even cynicism. Never before the late 18th. century had there been such widespread millenarian hopes ; and never before had there been such a rebound as the early 19th century experienced ; and some modern interpreters of the Romantic Movement read it mainly in socio-political terms. But certain spirits whom we call Romantic were apocalyptic thinkers in a wider sense. Blake is the most impressively thorough-going of them all in England ; for though he had plenty to say about the ills of European society, he considered that the cure lay in greater inwardness, rather than a preoccupation

with the material for its own sake, and that this inwardness would itself be the basis for juster relations at the material level. 'When Imagination, Art and Science and all Intellectual Gifts, all the Gifts of the Holy Ghost, are look'd upon as of no use and only Contention remains to Man, then the Last Judgement begins ..' But men are too insensitive to realise that they are living in a time of judgement ; so the artist becomes a prophet, through whom 'The Imaginative Image returns by the seeds of Contemplative Thought' ('A Vision of the Last Judgment', 1810). Contemplation embraces more than an apocalyptic interest, however ; it is as much concerned with the introspective pursuit of self-knowledge, and the intuitive understanding of the ground of Being. Yet when contemplative thought finds poetic expression, it is commonly in terms of what Blake called 'the Imaginative Image', that is to say, in visionary images of lost and recovered paradise. Blake himself made these images in mythical, supernatural form ; but Wordsworth's visions are sustained by nature in a unique way. His lost paradise is not described in a directly mythical manner, but rather in terms of nature's ministry to its consciousness.

Since we are so accustomed to think of Wordsworth's and Coleridge's work as a sheer break with the past, it may be instructive to consider how much their contemplative strain owes to tradition, if only to come to understand what is genuinely new about it.

The European Renaissance is often described as a great process of secularisation ; but it is important to understand clearly what this exactly means. One way of putting it is to say that the medieval idea of contemplation as the reserve of an elite at the top of society, dedicated to seek the knowledge of God and of their own souls, with the help of the Offices of the Church, was replaced by a higher rating of the rights and duties of the active layman, who was also encouraged to be something of a contemplative too. Thus some of the great works of intellect of the Renaissance were written by civil servants, with a very high and religious notion of their role in society. So if the Renaissance was in this special sense a secularising process it could also be described in terms of a wider idea of the religious life. This widening has two features which are particularly interesting for their effect on the arts—one is the syncretistic urge which seeks a harmony between different mythologies, classical and Biblical ; and the other, closely related to this, is the strong and widespread sense of cosmic analogy. If we are discussing epic poetry like *The Faerie Queene*, we will want to stress the syncretic play with mythologies ; if we are discussing Metaphysical poetry we will stress cosmic analogy ; and both interests are part of the contemplative life of

the Renaissance. Both 'went underground' during the late 17th and 18th centuries, and both were taken up for re-interpretation by the Romantics. The syncretistic urge bore fruit in the search for new mythologies and non-dogmatic interpretation of the old myths ; and the sense of living cosmic analogy is as powerfully realised as it has ever been. But again a further secularisation took place, this time more thorough-going than the relative secularisation of the Renaissance. We can symbolise it in this way : Donne and Herbert were priests, though married priests, and their contemplative poetry is full of traditional ecclesiastical symbolism ; Coleridge, and Wordsworth even more so, lived by their priesthood to poetry, and believed that a fidelity to their own deepest introspection and private experience would lead them to Truth.

### *Coleridge, Donne and Contemplative Tradition*

In his prose writings Coleridge was much more explicit than Wordsworth about his theory of contemplation and its relation to tradition, and some of the images in which he realises his theory are strikingly powerful.

'The first range of hills, that encircles the scanty vale of human life, is the horizon for the majority of its inhabitants. On its ridges the common sun is born and departs. From *them* the stars rise, and touching *them* they vanish. By the many, even this range, the natural limit and bulwark of the vale, is but imperfectly known. Its higher ascents are too often hidden by mists and clouds from uncultivated swamps, which few have courage or curiosity to penetrate. To the multitude below these vapours appear, now as the dark haunts of terrific agents, on which none may intrude with impunity ; and now all aglow, with colours not their own, they are gazed at as the splendid palaces of happiness and power. But in all ages there have been a few, who measuring and sounding the rivers of the vale at the feet of their furthest inaccessible falls have learned, that the sources must be far higher and far inward ; a few, who even in the level stream have detected elements, which neither the vale itself nor the surrounding mountains contained or could supply.'

[ *Biographia Literaria*, Chap. XII. pp. 118-19, Everyman edn. ]

This mysterious range of hills—anyone who knows the English Lake District with its mists and falls will recognise how they took on their symbolic aspect from Coleridge's residence there in their presence—have become intimations of the life of philosophical introspection. 'The

sources must be far higher and far inward'. In these two simple adjectives Coleridge catches two characteristic traditional ways of imaging mystery, as transcendence and as inwardness, and we marvel at the ease with which he reconciles these opposites in the image of the stream at its source. This is the stream of self-consciousness which meditation had followed, according to the Socratic precept 'Know thyself', not indeed to the source, for this remains hidden, but to the point where the individual self discloses' elements, which neither the vale itself nor the surrounding mountains contained or could supply'. What Romantic thought did was to make the religious quest an analogy for the poetic quest, sometimes even identical with it. For Coleridge poetry, like intuitive experience in general, is 'dependent upon more, and more fugitive causes' than everyday experience and the lower kind of scientific thinking.

Coleridge describes this special kind of consciousness very carefully, distinguishing it both 'from mere reflection and *re-presentation* on' on the one hand, and on the other from 'those flights of lawless speculation which, abandoned by *all* distinct consciousness' transcend 'the bounds and purposes of our intellectual faculties'. There is a kind of knowledge of ideas which is not the second-hand appropriation of facts or of other people's thought : 'deep thinking is attainable only by means of deep feeling, and all truth is a species of revelation' ( Letter to Poole, March 23, 1801 ). This kind of knowledge may express itself in the philosophical concept ; it also expresses itself naturally in the poetic symbol. As contemplative thought at its best has always done, Coleridge stressed the passivity essential for the rising of such concepts and symbols on the waters. It was Plotinus whom he quoted to place his ideas in tradition : "We ought not to pursue it ('the highest and intuitive knowledge') with a view of detecting its secret source, but to watch in quiet till it suddenly shines upon us ; preparing ourselves for the blessed spectacle as the eye waits patiently for the rising sun". (*Biographia Literaria*, Chap. XII, *ed. cit.*, p. 120 ).

Coleridge was interested not only in the condition of genuine intuitive knowledge, but also in the condition in which people communicate genuinely with one another. This condition is '*freedom*', the medium 'which they possess in common, as the common ethereal element of their being, the tremulous reciprocations of which propagate themselves even to the inmost of the soul. Where the spirit of man is not *filled* with the consciousness of freedom ( were it only from its restlessness, as of one still struggling in bondage ) all spiritual intercourse is interrupted, not only with others, but even with himself. No wonder, then, that he remains incomprehensible to himself as well as to others', (*B.L.*, Chap. XII, p. 121).

Coleridge recognised with clarity the state of what we have come to call alienation, 'the fearful desert of consciousness' in which 'he wearies himself out with empty words, to which no friendly echo answers, either from his own heart, or the heart of a fellow being'; (*Ibid.*) The reason he gives for this state is loss of freedom. But what is this freedom? It is detachment from dependence upon 'mere words from without'; 'notional phantoms, the mere refractions from unseen and distant truths through the distorting medium of his own unenlivened and stagnant understanding'.

This concern with intuitive knowledge, with inner freedom, with the grounds of mutual communication, was not new. Though it was his reading of his immediate predecessors and contemporaries, such as Kant, which established Coleridge's attitude, he was in fact placing himself in the main-stream of western contemplative thinking. St. Augustine's *Confessions*, with their strong introspective bent and their special fusion of the New Testament with the Platonism and Plotinus, had established these interests thirteen centuries earlier. He also had sketched out the way two people share each other's truth. 'I verily see it not in thee, nor thou in me: but both of us in the self-same unchangeable truth, which is above our minds' (*Confessions*, XII. 25). He had described the condition of mind in which a man discovers that the divine image is appearing in his own consciousness like a recreation of something lost. Though Augustine did not use the word 'freedom', he was in his own way describing the freedom so basic to Coleridge's own view of the highest knowledge. And Augustine had also written of the souls watered 'by a secret and sweet spring', far from the turbulent ocean below, 'that the Earth may bring forth fruit, works of mercy' (XIII. 17).

'How had these contemplative ideas and images fared in English poetry before Coleridge and Wordsworth? Metaphysical poetry offers us some significant instances. Donne's 'Satyre On Religion' measures and sounds the rivers of the vale, the different dogmatic versions of religion and anti-religion in his time, and decides with Coleridge that 'the sources must be far higher and far inward'.

As stremes are, Power is : those blest flowers that dwell  
At the rough stremes calme head, thrive and do well,  
But having left their roots, and themselves given  
To the stremes tyrannous rage, alas, are driven  
Through mills, and rockes, and woods, and at last, almost  
Consum'd in going, in the sea are lost ;  
So perish Soules, which more chuse mens unjust  
Power from God claym'd, than God himselfe to trust.

This passage, however, throws up the difference between Coleridge's interests and Donne's as clearly as the resemblance. Donne was mainly concerned, much as Augustine had been, with the limits of power in society (in the 1590's, when the poem was written, religious and political power were far from being strictly separated in Europe) and with the absolutist claims of different systems to be *the truth*. Coleridge, on the other hand, was concerned with a much subtler form of tyranny, the lazy content of the mind with halftruths and borrowed notions which have never been made part of one's essential inner being. Yet both image their concerns in the stream at its calm source and in the valley far from the source. Donne's valley is a rough area of destruction; Coleridge's is at worst 'a fearful desert of consciousness'. Donne subtly suggests the interpenetration of man's social and inner life, whereas Coleridge's attention is concentrated particularly on his inner awareness. This shift in emphasis is characteristic of Romantic writing. Another shift is from the Renaissance stress upon activity to the Romantic stress upon the passive. So Donne writes

On a huge hill,  
Cragged and steep, Truth stands, and hee that will  
Reach her, about must, and about must goe;  
And what the hills suddenness resists, winne so.

Coleridge's image of ascent is the 'small water-insect in the surface of rivulets, which throws a cinque-spotted shadow fringed with prismatic colours on the sunny bottom of the brook'. He has noticed 'how the little animal wins its way up against the stream, by alternate pulses of active and passive motion, now resisting the current, and now yielding to it in order to gather strength and a momentary *fulcrum* for a further propulsion. This is no unapt emblem of the mind's self-experience in the art of thinking.' (*B. L.*, Chap. VII, p. 60). Coleridge is closer to psychological fact than Donne, whose purpose was not one of descriptive analysis of the higher reaches of man's mind, but moral persuasion of his readers not to give up the ardours of thought. 'Yet strive so, that before age, death's twilight, Thy Soule rest...' However, when we come to think of it, Coleridge's image of the tiny insect moving upwards against the flow of the stream contains its own remarkable rigours.

Images from organic life rose characteristically in Coleridge's mind when he came to write of the imaginative process. When he paid tribute to certain western mystics for preventing his mind from 'being imprisoned within the outline of any single dogmatic system', he described the presentiment they had given him 'that all the products of the mere reflective

faculty partook of death, and were as the rattling twigs and sprays in winter, into which a sap was yet to be propelled from some root to which I had not penetrated, if they were to afford my soul either food or shelter.' (B.L., Chap. IX, 70). Donne had written

As the trees sap doth seek the root below  
In winter, in my winter now I goe,  
Where none but thee, th'Eternall root  
Of true Love I may know.

( 'A Hymne to Christ, at the Authors last going into Germany' ) Donne's orientation is distinctly religious: the root is the divine source of love obscured under worldly concerns, which comes into play especially in periods of outward deprivation. I think that here Donne was probably directly remembering Augustine, who constantly returned in his writings to the image of the root of love. For him winter symbolised man's temporal life as a whole, not any particular harsh experience. '*For you are dead*', says the Apostle, just as trees during the winter; they appear as if withered and dead. Well, then, what if we are dead? The root is deep within: where our root is, there is our life also, for there is our charity' *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, XXXVI. 1-2). In Coleridge the image is wonderfully realised again in terms of the psychology of knowing: the root, like the stream's source, is the hiding-place of man's power.\* It is perhaps fashionable to think of Coleridge's organic imagery as something peculiarly Romantic, a reaction from the mechanistic analogies which held the centre of European attention after Descartes; but the ancient religious language was unselfconsciously full of symbols from organic processes. After the mechanistic hayday of the eighteenth century, however, writers understood exactly why the organic analogy was important, in a way earlier writers could not have done.

#### *Wordsworth, Vaughan and the Landscape of the Mind.*

When we talk about cosmic analogy in Renaissance poetry, I suppose most readers will think of the great world of nature mirroring in numberless

\* This image appears in Schiller's *Wallenstein*, which Coleridge translated, 1799, Act II

Thou hast gained thy point, Octavio! Once more am I  
Almost as friendless as at Regensburg.  
There I had nothing left me but myself—  
But what one man can do, you have now experience.  
The twigs have you hewed off, and here I stand  
A leafless trunk. But in the sap within  
Love's the creating power, and a new world  
May sprout forth from it... (1-10).

emblems the little world of man, the kind of analogy which provides for moral discriminations and psychological niceties, since the great world is stuffed with a super-abundance of creatures whose differences bring out some variation in the life of man at the centre. Wordsworth described such analogy-making in *The Prelude* (1805), 282-3, 285-88; as 'Nature's secondary grace, That outward illustration which is hers', 'The charm more superficial and yet sweet Which from her works finds way, contemplated As they hold forth a genuine counterpart And softening mirror of the moral world.' But the world of nature might also momentarily mirror, not the world of man as it is, but a world of lost perfection, or its changes a world of apocalyptic destruction and splendour; and these images are just as much a part of cosmic analogy of the Renaissance period.

If Henry Vaughan is ever mentioned in the same breath as Wordsworth, it is because Vaughan wrote his own 'intimations of immortality' in 'The Retreat'; but they have certain inner affinities which go beyond any particular poem, and which cannot be reduced to the direct acquaintance of Wordsworth with Vaughan's poetry. What we can do, by laying them side by side, is rather to suggest some ways in which Wordsworth developed the earlier contemplative tradition in poetry.

Several of Vaughan's best poems are apocalyptic in the sense of the New Testament, intuitions of the divine advent which will complete human history and restore perfection; and what is striking about these poems is that it is some change in sky and time, wind and weather which brings such intimations. Professor Louis Martz, in his recent book *The Paradise Within*, has pointed to the Augustinian flavour of Vaughan's kind of contemplation, in its free association not tied to strictly rigid dogmatic formulations, and in its penchant for recollection in tranquillity of intuitions lost to direct experience but alive in the memory. Other poems of Vaughan do, however, live in "a present joy" (the phrase is Wordsworth's, *The Prelude* I. 56), and his Language shows a remarkable interpenetration of mind and landscape. Take the poem entitled 'Mount of Olives':

When first I saw true beauty, and thy Joys  
 Active as light, and calm without all noise  
 Shin'd on my soul, I felt through all my pow'r's  
 Such a rich air of sweets, as Evening show'r's  
 Fan'd by a gentle gale Convey and breath  
 On some parch'd bank, crown'd with a flowrie wreath ;  
 Odors, and Myrrh, and balm in one rich floud  
 O'r-ran my heart, and spirited my bloud,  
 My thoughts did swim in Comforts, and mine eie  
 Confest, *The world did only paint and lie.*

This poem bodies forth the quality of a spiritual state: his sense of the divine presence and the influence of grace on a soul which previously did no safe course steer  
But wander'd under tempests all the year, Went bleak and bare in body as in mind, And was blow'n through by ev'ry storm and wind.' In contrast,

I am so warm'd now by this glance on me,  
That, 'midst all storms I feel a Ray of thee.

it is like 'a lively sense of spring' brought in the beauty of a winter landscape 'To my Cold thoughts'. He is himself a withered plant beginning 'to look green and flourish'; and the poem ends, as it began, with 'Joy'. The reader who turns his mind from this short poem to the first book of *The Prelude* must be struck by the correspondence in sensibilities. In both poets, the 'now' of present joy points back to 'when first' and forwards to anticipations of future song, in both, joyful participation in organic life passes over, almost imperceptibly, into spiritual joy. In Vaughan the transition is lightly indicated by *as* and *so*; in Wordsworth it is made from 'on my body' to 'felt within A corresponding mild creative breeze', what he calls 'nature's ministry'. For both, this inspiration is 'active as light'—'a power that does not come unrecognized', a storm, Which, breaking up a long-continued frost Brings with it vernal promises', as Wordsworth puts it. Vaughan's awareness of 'true Beauty', as is characteristic of the older Platonism, moves through sight to invade the other senses, as all his powers come fully awake: being shone upon, he himself begins to 'shine' and 'sing'. Though Wordsworth could also describe inspiration in terms of 'hurtless light Opening the peaceful clouds' (353-4), wind is more characteristic of his experience; and while this may be a 'gentle breeze' it may also have the more disturbing presence of a tempest. Both poets knew that the mysterious growth of the inner life depended upon 'severer interventions' (355) as well as 'fearless visitings' (352); and before Wordsworth made Nature the direct minister of his moral education, Vaughan verged close upon the same identification of the inner and outer tempest. He does not need the help of books, Vaughan says in 'Joy', 'who can have A lesson plaid him by a wind or wave.'

Thou hast

Another mirth, a mirth though overcast  
With clouds and rain, yet full as calm and fine  
As those clear heights which above tempests shine.

Or, as Wordsworth finely expressed it through another metaphor in *The Prelude*, Book 1.

The mind itself

The meditative mind, best pleased, perhaps,  
While she, as duteous as the Mother Dove,  
Sits brooding, lives not always to that end,  
But hath less quiet instincts, goadings on

That drive her as in trouble through the groves. (1805. 149-54).

Just as in the present Wordsworth was aware that poetry was born from periods of distress, so he was amazed, in recollecting 'all the terrors, all the early miseries, Regrets, vexations, lassitudes', that they 'should ever have made up The calm existence that is mine when I Am worthy of myself.' Yet he half-apologizes for beginning with such early recollections of 'days Disown'd by memory', which were to be mature life like 'snowdrops among winter snows' 'ere the birth of spring' (1805. 643-4). On the one hand he stresses slow unconscious growth, like the life of the seed underground; on the other he suggests that the 'bond of union betwixt life and joy' (585) is related to early intuitions of the mind's transcendence of nature. So he remembers when he was ten years old, 'I held unconscious intercourse With the eternal Beauty, drinking in A pure organic pleasure...' (589-91). Vaughan was more sure of conscious absolute beginnings, but they are both aware of the way the mind grows beyond nature.

It is interesting to see through what poetic procedure the two poets subordinate nature to the mind's expérience of itself. Both work through memory and its play with the categories of time, both recover past experience and in so doing interpret it, transcending it through contemplating it, so that 'now' becomes 'then' and vice-versa. But for Vaughan, as befits a lyric poet, the vehicle of subordination is the simile.

So have I known some beauteous *Paisage* rise  
In suddain flowres and arbours to my Eies,  
And in the depth and dead of winter bring  
To my cold thoughts a lively sense of sprin. (17-20).

Wordsworth, as befits his slow-moving 'meditative history', has more complex relations with his recollections. His memory is not simply a storehouse of images (the typical Renaissance way of regarding it) but is veritably haunted by images, which can come alive again like daemonic presences, 'unknown modes of being'. The conscious mind bows humbly before the presences of nature, which are themselves sometimes clearly symbols of reaches of mind 'far higher and far inward', and sometimes stand in their own selfhood over against him. What we can say of both is that landscape is never simply the mirror of a mood, but of some spiritual essence.

In their play upon present, past and future they made their poetry into

prophecy, which recovers the past for the present, or carries the best of the present into the future. The first 54 lines of *The Prelude*, in the present tense, recover a strain of joyful hope and release from its aftermath of despondency to prompt the poet to further hope. The characteristic prayer which ends a Vaughan poem is also a bridge from 'now' towards things to come.

The Continuities which this sort of study has discovered are certain powerful images for the workings of the mind—the stream and its source, the mountain, the insect moving on the face of the stream, the seed or root growing secretly underground in winter but sending out green shoots as a presage of things to come. These are organic images, belonging to nature's processes, which long ago became images of the mind's transcendence over nature in self-knowledge. Their history in poetry, as we have rather briefly suggested, is part of the history of European consciousness; and Coleridge and Wordsworth, standing at the beginning of the modern era, made them most characteristically their own.

# RANDOM THOUGHTS ON WORDSWORTH

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S. C. SEN

## I

THE title for this short essay is chosen to avoid raising expectation about what the writer has to say. At this late day little can be said on Wordsworth that has not already been said by others but the remarks that will be made will not be offered as a disconnected series. A preliminary observation regarding some important aspects of Wordsworth's poetry will be followed by a more detailed study of his landscape with reference to his theory of poetry, on which T.S. Eliot offered certain comments, testifying more to youthful arrogance than to critical discrimination.

The short poem 'My heart leaps up when I behold/ A rainbow in the sky' has a central significance to his work as a statement of poetic faith. Palgrave in the *Golden Treasury* has placed it immediately before the Immortality Ode with admirable tact. After the two lines already quoted, the poet goes on : "So was it when my life began,/So is it now I am a man,/So be it when I shall grow old". The poem was written in 1802. The Immortality Ode followed some two or three years later. Meanwhile he discovered the untenability of his faith. The hand of time has overthrown his expectation about the future :

The glory and the freshness of a dream.  
It is not now as it hath been of yore ;—  
    Turn wheresoe'er I may,  
    By night or day,  
    The things which I have seen I now can see no more.

The journey since *The Rainbow* has been weary one but not without significant gains. It was not simple disenchantment, a fading away of things he loved but also an emergence of new values and a self-discovery :

To me the meanest flower that blows can give  
    Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

While he had rejoiced at aspects of Nature and was capable of a simple response to their appeal, he now turned more inward and the sense of an access to the Great Design floats now in the atmosphere manifesting itself as the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge, which he had described as the soul of Poetry. It is interesting to note that Tagore's

poem "Hriday amar nachere ajike, etc." is written under the influence of *The Rainbow*.

Wordsworth is often called a mystic. The following passage from "Tintern Abbey" is an illustration of this metaphysical element in his experience :

That serene and blessed mood  
In which the affections gently lead us on,—  
Until, the breath of this corporeal frame  
And even the motion of our human blood  
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep  
In body, and become a living soul.

Thomas G. Bergin in his work on Dante (1) observes "the enraptured sleep is not unknown to mystics". Dante is not a mystic in the strict sense, he tells us and observes continuing the argument : "Dante is only rarely in that state of mind called apathy ; he is not the passive object of the total and free action of God except in the vision of the Empyrean". Wordsworth has experienced the "enraptured sleep" but he too is only rarely in the state of mind called apathy. Much of this mystical experience is found in the two famous Odes and very little outside them.

## II

I read the whole of Wordsworth's poetry to collect some facts about his landscape. My aim was to study the objective basis of his reflexions on Nature. An objective approach such as this is likely to provoke the criticism that it is inept and prosaic. Although there is some truth in the view yet measurements and calculations can throw light on the artist's attitude and technique, which we can hardly dispense with. One is for example surprised to notice the omissions in the Wordsworth world of flora and fauna. And if we ask, what are they due to, we may possibly come to some interesting conclusions.

I am giving below a list of plants and animals mentioned in his poetry :

### (A) Plants.

Amaranth. Apple. Ash. Aspin. Acorn. Acacia. Aspen. Alder. Briar. Birch. Beech. Broom. Butterfly. Bramble. Currant. Chestnut. Cedar. Cuckoo flower. Carnation. Celandine. Cypress. Crocus. Cyclades. Cowslip. Cherry tree. Citron. Daffodil. Dandelion. Daisy. Eglantine. Elm. Elder. Fern. Furz. Fir. Forget-me-not. Foxglove. Gowan. Grape. Gooseberry. Gorse. Herbs. Holly. Hazel. Heart-ease. Hawthorn. Harebell. Hyacinth. Heath. Hyssop. Hart's

Horn. Ivy. Jasmine. Juniper. King Cup. Love Lies. Bleeding. Lily. Laurel. Lotus. Larch. Lichen. Lime tree. Myrtle. Marigold. Maple. Moss. Maize. Mulberry. Manna. Nightshade. Oak. Olive. Orange. Poplar. Pear. Pansy. Prim Rose. Plane tree. Poppy. Palm. Pine. Ragwort. Rose. Rushes. Strawberry. Sycamore. Speedwell. Star of Bethlehem. Snowdrop. Spear grass. Thistle. Thorn. Thyme. Thrysus. Turnip. Vine. Violet. Yew. Woodbine. Walnut. Willow. Weed. Water lily. Whortle berries.

(B) *Birds and Animals*

Ass. Antler. Bear. Buck. Bittern. Bee. Bustard. Butterfly. Blackbird. Bird of Paradise. Bird of Heaven. Beetle. Buzzard. Crocodile. Cuckoo. Cicada. Cricket. Caterpillar. Cow. Colt. Crow. Cat. Chamois. Cockatoo. Cormorant. Cock. Dog. Dor-hawk. Dromedary. Deer. Duck. Doe. Dopingay. Eagle. Falcon. Fly. Fawn. Frog. Glow worm. Goat. Grey Hound. Horse. Heron. Hare. Hedgehog. Hound. Heart. Hind. Hawk. Heifer. Hornet. Hen. Insect. Jay. Kite. Kid. Kitten. Leveret. Lamb. Locust. Lion. Linnet. Leopard. Lynx. Lintwhite. Lizard. Lark. Moth. Mole. Magpie. Mastiff. Monkey. Mule. Muccawiss. Mare. Nautilus. Nightingale. Newt. Otter. Osprey. Ostrich. Owl. Ox. Poppinjay. Pelican. Pony. Plover. Parrot. Palfrey. Philomel. Redbreast. Raven. Rabbit. Robin Goodfellow. Reptile. Rook. Roe. Rat. Swan. Swallow. Sourd. Snail. Sheep. Steed. Skylark. Steer. Stag. Spider. Slow-worm. Squirrel. Tabby. Toad. Thrush. Tiger. Turtle Dove. Tortoise. Throstle. Wren. Wolf. Worm. Wood Cock.

(C) *Fish*

*Fish. Leaping Fish. Minnow. Herring. Pike. Whale.*

*Comments :* It is hardly to be expected that Wordsworth will write about birds, animals, etc. like a botanist, zoologist or ornithologist. Nor can he be as interested in fish as a pisciculturist. Yet even from the common man's point of view there are large gaps in his study. A few of his omissions will be mentioned. In his world there are no ants, termites, fleas, cockroaches, bugs, mosquitoes and weasels. We do not notice, snipes, canaries, storks, tern, among his birds. Walrus, Beaver, Camel, Bison, Salamander, Sloth, Baboon are not honoured by a single reference. Similarly, the landscape of trees is also inadequate. We do not come across lilacs, wistarias, or bamboos, anemones, begonias, camomiles, etc. in his poetry.

Alexander von Humboldt, who was only a year older than Wordsworth made the most detailed study of plant and animal life and travelled

widely all over the world for the purpose His most fruitful contribution was his pictorial views of South American flora and fauna, which brought about a revolution in the contemporary conception of landscape in western art. He laid great store on the "Totaleindruck einer Gegend—Einheit in der Vielheit." (The total impression of a region, the unity in multiplicity).<sup>2</sup> His study led from Nature as Landscape to Nature as Cosmos (p. 141).

Unlike Humboldt Wordsworth did not pay attention to individual features of Nature. Frequently he wrote about a bird or tree without trying to identify it. His purpose was quite different from Humboldt's. They seem to start at different ends. Humboldt arrived at his conception of unity from the study of individual plant and animal. Wordsworth on the other hand had an intuition of this unity and saw its confirmation in the world of Nature.

Will it be just to conclude that Wordsworth did not know his Nature well enough to give us a true conception of it and strayed into metaphysics from ignorance of the true facts ? His victories will then seem undeserved. But there is another mode of dealing with the question, which assures justice to the Poet. This is to examine his definition of poetry and to see if it offers any explanation of the attitude of inadequacy to Nature, to which attention has been drawn. He wrote : "Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings : it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity".

A great part of what he wrote answers to this description or definition. He wrote what he remembered of Nature and of his own emotions. His practice was different from Shakespeare's. The great dramatist imaginatively exploited the resources of the language and was not confined by the boundaries of memory ; "With purple grapes, green figs, and mulberries" (MN. Dream. III. I. 170). "Virtue ! a fig (*Othello*. I. III. 322.)

T. S. Eliot did not think Wordsworth's definition valid. "Consequently, we must believe," he wrote "that 'emotion recollected in tranquillity' is an inexact formula. For it is neither emotion, nor recollection, nor without distortion of meaning, tranquillity. It is a concentration, and a new thing resulting from the concentration, of a very great number of experiences which to the practical and active person would not seem to be experiences at all." (*Tradition and Individual Talent*.)

Eliot's attitude reminds us of a teacher lecturing a class of fourth form children. He is instructing them how to think *rightly* about poetry. He himself saw the dogmatism of his attitude here and elsewhere and so we find him saying in the essay "The Music of Poetry" : "I can never re-read 'any of my prose writings without acute embarrassment." . His

own dogmatism has given way to a more reasoned view, which may be quoted : "The poet, at the back of his mind, if not as his ostensible purpose, is always trying to defend the kind of poetry he is writing, or to formulate the kind that he wants to write." (*On Poetry And Poets*. Faber. p. 26)

In the light of what Eliot says at a later date one can see that Wordsworth's offence because of a difference in outlook from him is now fully and generously condoned. Wordsworth was entirely faithful to his doctrine and in my later references to his lyrics this point will be more elaborately dealt with. In *The Prelude* (Book First, lines 45-46) Wordsworth writing about a present experience without an intervening period for his memory to work upon it called the attention of his readers to the fact :

Thus far, O Friend ! did I, not used to make  
A present joy the matter of a song.

Wordsworth knew the job he was doing and his poetical criticism always revealed an insight and sensitiveness, which often proved superior to the learning and subtlety of his great collaborator in the production of the *Lyrical Ballads*. I shall now make a little digression so as to give point to the title chosen for this essay.

### *Vagaries of Critical Doctrines*

T. S. Eliot quotes certain passages out of Othello and Timon as illustration of what he called self-dramatization. The phrase like others of his coinage, hardly makes any sense yet many seem to go into raptures over such word-making skill of which Eliot was a master. Timon and Othello are not creatures of this world, they are not creatures of flesh and blood and are only dramatic creations. There is therefore no scope for self-dramatization on their part. For the poet has dramatized all their acts and emotions. I also object to Coleridge's famous definition : "The secondary Imagination...dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to create." My explanation for this is that a true definition must be rendered in a non-metaphorical language. For when the metaphors are withdrawn, we hardly understand the purport of the statement.

### III

The movement of his lyrics towards a summit is the movement of recollection arriving at a passionate, visionary or universal view or some form of comprehensive conception by an ascent from remembering to

reflexion. With no other great poet as with Wordsworth do we find the concluding lines so startlingly revelatory. If the body of a poem bears evidence of memory, the elevation at the end that of the tranquillity of spirit, which gathers together the fragments for a statement, which can sometimes be enjoyed and understood even apart from the context.

I shall examine a few poems to ascertain how far my view can be sustained. The poet's homage to his wife ("She was a phantom of delight") may provide a good starting-point for the purpose. The first two stanzas out of the three are concerned with recollection, the last with a reconstruction of the whole personality :

And yet a Spirit still, and bright

With something of an angel-light.

Although the word 'reflexion' has been used, the transition more frequently is to a visionary power whose emergence is incalculable but in Wordsworth it seemed to have an intimate relation to the functioning of recollection. Some of the Lucy poems may be briefly considered from the same point of view. Lucy has been generally thought to be a figment of the poet's imagination but the poem "Among All Lovely Things My Love Had Been", which does not seem to have been anthologised, gives a different impression. Here the poet tells us that Lucy had never seen a glow-worm and so while riding near her home in a stormy night, he caught one and laid it on a leaf and placed the leaf under a tree.

The whole next day, I hoped, and hoped with fear ;

At night the Glow-worm shone beneath the Tree :

I led my Lucy to the spot, "Look here ! "

Oh ! joy it was for her, and joy for me !

A foot-note adds. "The incident described in this poem took place in 1795—probably at Racedown—between the poet and his sister Dorothy.—Ed." (*The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*. O.U.P. 1923. p. 623). It is, however, obvious that Dorothy cannot be identified with Lucy.

The resounding end of the poem "A sleep did my spirit seal" also records the cosmic ascent. "The Education of Nature" has the two lines as conclusion :

The memory of what has been,

And never more will be.

which seem to rise to a universal lament. The summit of passion or vision thus frequently emerges in the concluding lines of the lyrics. Some more examples follow and as they are well known, no references seem called for :

"Speak, that my torturing doubts their end may know !"

"Neither present time, nor years unborn

Could to my sight that heavenly face restore".

"Alas ! The gratitude of men  
Hath oftener left me mourning."

It is useless to cite more examples. For mere number will not illuminate the subject until the view is somehow or other enlarged by our awareness of a new element not noticed before. Perhaps one may conclude on the basis of the poet's tendency to reserve the best bit for the end that he has an invincible orthodoxy in his nature and that he follows the custom of the dining table in serving the choicest morsel of his poetry to his reader. Or perhaps the end of a poem naturally provides the climactic moment, which rightly brings into action his best imaginative powers. All these explanations have their value but the most significant is the view which establishes a connexion between this practice and his utterance on the nature of poetry, which has already been quoted.

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## WORDSWORTH IN LIGHTER VEINS

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K. LAHIRI

DID Wordsworth ever laugh? There is no evidence in his poetry of a hearty laugh of the man. We doubt if William Wordsworth at all laughed aloud, even audibly. The stolid serenity of his visage was hardly disturbed by any spurt of animal vivacity. The image of the poet formed in his reader's mind is that of a middle-aged, bald-headed sober philosopher always ready to moralise, to read a message in Nature. Serious constitutionally, he can hardly be caught in a light vein.

The traditionally accepted image of a serious Wordsworth has been unconsciously 'conditioned by the equine solemnity of the portraits' in which it has been the fancy of painters to depict the poet in his old age. 'Grave, saturnine'—these are the epithets Hazlitt uses to characterise the poet's physical features, but then he adds a relieving touch to his sketch: Wordsworth's figure has 'a slight indication of sly humour, a convulsive inclination to laughter about the mouth'.

In Wordsworth's poetry the nearest approach to an indulgence in humour is a soft, faint smile which for a moment flickers on his lips and at the next is lost in his habitual gravity and coldness of countenance. The humour is scarcely perceptible, far from provoking an uproarious, boisterous, side-splitting laughter'.

Humour is not normally compatible with the romantic temper. Romantic poets generally are in a solemn, transcendental mood. Wordsworth, the leader, is more so. They are constantly thrown into an idealized, sublime vision. Only Byron, with his supreme disgust for restrictions—social, political and religious—on the absolute liberty of the individual, indulges in fits of satire from which humour is not far off.

Wordsworth, when he is not preoccupied with artless narrative, easily lapses into a contemplative mood, in which he seeks a peaceful communion with the tranquil spirit of Nature, or expresses his natural sympathy for humanity in life's little ironies and tragedies too deep for tears. Genuine humour seems to be foreign to the constitution of the poet in Wordsworth. Even when he is placed in a happy stance or light situation, from which humour is just the mood normally expected to issue, Wordsworth's reflective tendency plays the trick, pushing his poetry into the blind alley of his wonted didacticism, or his innate humanism flies tangent, escaping

into the safe resort of a healthy naturalism. Neither of these moods is congenial to the cultivation of the spirit of humour.

Yet Wordsworth's poetic temper is not totally unconscious of or averse to the comic aspects of life, as we are apt to misconceive him and his poetry. His nature, perpetually gravitating towards heavy seriousness, may be occasionally detected floating lightly for a moment in the outskirts of buoyancy. He is not constitutionally frigid and incapable of humour; but he is quite sensitive to comic situations and susceptible to indulgence in a light mood, provided it does not cross the bounds of natural piety or disturb his normal tranquillity and poise of spirit by lapsing into the ridiculous that tends to land into satire. In Wordsworth's poetry passages are not altogether rare where humour 'crops out in gambolling playfulness and quirkish wit'. A breadth of drollery is particularly in the man's vein.

Humour spots in Wordsworth's poetry are few and far between. And only a long and thorough search can trace these for what they are worth. From a volume of seven hundred double-column pages of Wordsworth's complete poetical works not more than forty passages, covering about a dozen pages, can be compiled to illustrate his humour, and of these too some are of dubious merit as genuine specimens of humour. John E. Jordan labours hard to prove that Wordsworth had humour in him by harvesting four columns of jokey remarks from some fifty years of the poet's correspondence.

Comic situations and humorous passages are not scattered galore in Wordsworth's poetry. One has to make efforts in digging into relatively obscure, less familiar, regions of his verse to salvage and extract precious bits of innocently enjoyable humour out of the long-stretching granite strata of solemn moralisings and contemplations. Wordsworth's humour is found in poems comparatively unknown. 'In his best known poems, which are lyrics, the humorous element is not strong'. Yet we come across 'comic exaggeration' in *Expostulation and Reply* and *The Tables Turned*, and a sort of ironic humour in *Anecdote for Fathers*. Even in *Prelude* Wordsworth 'looks back at his youthful sports with a wistful amusement' and laughs gently at his childhood games—tit-tat-toe and the 'thick-ribbed army' of heavy, cheap playing cards:

"Some plebian cards  
Which Fate, beyond the promise of their birth,  
Had dignified, and called to represent  
The persons of departed potentates."

*(Prelude, I, 522-525)*

Also most of Wordsworth's humorous poems come early in his poetic career. As he advances in years there is 'advance into solemnity.' It comes,

'not from a hardening of his risibilities, but from a new sense of his dedication to duty and a solemn sense of the function of poetry. In 1842 he wrote, "Power hath been given to please for higher ends than pleasure only."

Yet in Wordsworth's poetry, and in the life of the man, there is much more humour than has so far been recognised. A few passages no doubt diffuse a spontaneous spirit of humour, while many others appear to be laboured and strained, and, approaching very near genial humour, they recede farthest from it. Wordsworth achieves no more than 'laboured jocosity' when he tries to be funny. The poet himself makes

"No pretense  
To wit that deals in double sense."

( *The Waggoner* II, 194 )

In Wordsworth's humour there is no subtle play of wit traced by a sharp intellectual steel pen. He attempts a perception of humour, through the heart alone, through feeling and sympathy. Often a gentle, serene smile results from watching detachedly and enjoying innocently playful pranks of childhood, pitiful dotage of senility, or stupid antics of imbecility. There is not the slightest tinge of banter, bitterness or malicious glee at another's discomfiture; it is a pure philosophic smile.

Sensitiveness to incongruities in human nature and conduct, from which the sense of humour ultimately flows, is singularly lacking in Wordsworth's poetry. We do smile, even occasionally laugh, but we do so for reasons other than the right ones. How often we feel inclined to laugh at the poet's incapacity to see that his own writings lapse into the silly or ludicrous quite unintentionally! 'Incidents, situations, meant to be pathetic, are really so homely as to provoke a smile.' Twisting of simplicity, seeing the humble in a wry light—is a much-used device with Wordsworth for producing a comic effect.

Hence in Wordsworth's poetry light touches bordering on the humorous occur when the poet deals with unfamiliar characters like vagabonds, wanderers, tourists, idiots, or figures extreme in some aspect, such as little children or old people.

Wordsworth exploits cheaply the principle of exaggeration, in characterization or in style and versification. Thus occasionally he secures effect by 'appealing to the reader's sense of superiority through verbal hyperbole or extremes of characterization. When he wished to be funny he tended to sink his style into near doggerel or soar into an incongruous elevation of figure, allusion and diction. Most of his comic characters are grotesquely simple or subnormal'.

Common, ordinary folk and normal adults in his poetry have simple

natural affections in their intercourse with their kind, or are absorbed in a solemn, religious mood, or are overwhelmed with a deep pathos which does not admit of a lighter vein. They scarcely betray eccentricities or incongruities provoking either laughter or a grin.

If Wordsworth's simple folk do not show eccentricities, provoking laughter, his humour itself is conditioned by the common liability of the romantics, viz. his own eccentricities, which are sometimes 'too personal to be understood or appreciated in the social frame of comedy' (J. R. Caldwell : 'The Solemn Romantics', *Studies in the Comic*, VIII, ii, 261). The result is that humour tends to be 'heavy-handed, awkward, banal, tasteless'.

Wordsworth can ill-manage a perfect synthesis of the comic and the serious. His Harry Gill is a success that way, because Harry is by nature 'an incorrigibly ludicrous figure. But with *The Idiot Boy* and *Peter Bell* Wordsworth plays close to the distressing side of pathos. Our preconceptions are too strongly against laughing at distraught mothers and beaten asses. We are too sentimental to enjoy such humour. Pathos can blend into comedy when it is handled tenderly. Wordsworth comes close to this in *Alice Fell*. But he does not often achieve this blend. His humour has a rollicking boisterousness about it. He puts pathos and comedy crudely side by side'. No artistic fusion happens : the scale remains leaning towards the side of the pathetic.

This imbalance results from Wordsworth's innate 'didactic desire to drive home a clear point'. The characteristic type of drollery that Wordsworth often produces needs a disinterested treatment of which he is incapable. He always 'wants to make his comic characters teachers of some moral or psychological truth. His desire to instruct makes him heavy-handed, when he intends to be interesting. Telling a good story is never enough for Wordsworth : he would grind some other axe about morality or psychology.' The sense of the comic, despite its complex nature, has a delicate purity that cannot stand interference. Didacticism breaks the gossamer spell.

The largest number of passages in Wordsworth's poetry tinged with humour appears to be the portraits of children, childhood being a new theme introduced, rather revived, by the Romantics. He not only deifies the child in a solemn tone, but also occasionally takes pleasure in humorously sketching the figure of the child in its native innocence, its naive reactions to simple objects and creatures of Nature, or in its unsophisticated relation to adults.

When Wordsworth writes a little poem, *To H. C., Six Years Old*, Hartley, Coleridge's son, we expect him to be in a joking mood at the

incessant prattling of the child. The poet, we feel, is visibly delighted at the child's continuous babbling, unending, fanciful curiosities, and lively carollings. But instead of teasing, tickling and humouring the child for amusement, as any normal adult would be inclined to do, the poet's evil genius, gravity, sees a transcendental vision behind all childish prattle and pranks ;

“Oh thou ! Whose fancies from afar are brought ;  
Who of thy words dost make a mock apparel,  
And fittest to unutterable thought  
The breeze-like motion and the self-born carol ;  
Thou faery voyager !”

In contrast to this lost opportunity for humour, the comic situation born of the affected seriousness assumed by a girl of three is fully enjoyed by the poet in *Characteristics of a Child Three Years Old* :

“And Innocence hath privilege in her  
To dignify arch looks and laughing eyes ;  
And feats of cunning ; and the pretty round  
Of trespasses, affected to provoke  
Mock-chastisement and partnership in play.  
Light are her sallies as the tripping fawn’s  
Forth-startled from the fern where she lay couched.”

The poet is apparently amused at her mock-chastisement, her light sallies, and her bossing over her partner in play.

Another specimen of Wordsworth's attempt at humour out of childish playfulness is *The Rural Architecture*, a poem on three little boys,

“The highest not more  
Than the height of a counsellor’s bag.”

They climb to the top of Great How and indulge in the childish prank of building a man of stones :

“They built him and christened him all in one day,  
An urchin both vigorous and hale ;  
And so without scruple they called him Ralph Jones.”

This is sheer exuberant joy of life, but scarcely humour.

On the other hand, in *We are Seven* Wordsworth experiments on creating a sort of delicate humour out of a child's innocence in a tale inherently pathetic. A sad, yet sweet, smile was definitely there on the poet's lips when he argued in vein with the girl of eight that they were at the moment only five brothers and sisters, as Jane and John had died and were lying in their graves.

The poet begins solemnly :

‘—A simple child,  
What should she know  
Of death?’

But a sad kind of humour results from the poet’s playful questioning and her persistent conviction of the accuracy of her calculation. When the child finishes her simple narration of the occasions of the deaths of a sister and a brother, buried in the churchyard not far from their cottage door, the poet interrogates jokingly :

“How many are you, then,  
If they two are in heaven?”

Prompt comes the little maid’s reply, reasserting the correctness of her heart’s arithmetic :

“O Master ! We are seven.”

A child’s healthy reactions to ordinary phenomena of Nature amuse the poet. The moon is the source of such happiness and amusement in *An Evening Walk*. The poet is having a leisurely walk by the Grasmere Lake in the evening. He finds in a shed a beggar woman with her infants crying in their sleepiness. The poor mother, by pointing to the gliding moon in the clear sky above, makes the children stop crying and look up smiling :

“I see her now, denied to lay her head,  
On cold blue nights, in hut or straw-built shed,  
Turn to a silent smile their sleepy cry,  
By pointing to the gliding moon on high.”

It is the innocent smile of the child at the fresh and serene beauty of the rising moon, which has ever been the source of a pure delight, when pointed by a mother to her little one, in every age and clime. While this simple sight sets Wordsworth’s mind to his usual theorizing on Nature’s influence on man, his lips, we imagine, twitch slightly in a silent amused smile. Here, as in many other places, Wordsworth’s humour is buoyed up by ‘a rich earthiness, a robust awareness of the joy of things that warms the heart.’ Humour is almost equated to the joy of life.

A violent, as much as a tranquil, setting of Nature may affect a child in the same way to delight, and an adult is amused at such a childish reaction. In *Address to a Child, During a Boisterous Winter Evening, By My Sister* the poet is caught in a light, joking mood, addressing a child, being taken to bed, while a storm is raging outside. As the wind knocks hard at the doors and windows, the child will not get frightened, but it will, in the company of the adults, rather enjoy and laugh at the discomfiture of the giant being refused admission, knocking in vain :

“Come now we’ll to bed ! and when we are there  
He may work his own will, and what shall we care ?

He may knock at the door,—we'll not let him in ;  
 May drive at the windows,—we'll laugh at his din.'

As to mighty powers of Nature like the storm, so to little, odd creatures like frogs and cats and owls, a child's naive reactions are no less amusing to elders. But the poet's mood is not tuned properly in the poem with this long title, *Loving and Liking : Irregular verses, Supposed to have been addressed to a child By the Poet's Sister*:

"A frog leaps out from bordering grass,  
 Startling the timid as they pass,

...      ...      ...  
 Say not you love a roasted fowl,  
 But you may love a screaming owl,  
 And, if you can, the unwieldy toad  
 That crawls from his secure abode."

The poet misses the lighter side of the child's response, the funny sight of a child poking; stoning, teasing and being amused with such small, shabby creatures as flies and frogs; Wordsworth rather dwells on the child's innocent love for simple things of Nature.

He, however, seems to be in the right temper, not really in good humour, but in a light, gladsome mood in *The Kitten and Falling Leaves*. His infant daughter, Laura, is in the poet's arms. He amuses the child with a little funny show—a kitten on the wall, as it sports with leaves falling from a lofty elder tree :

"See the kitten on the wall,  
 Sporting with the leaves that fall.

...      ...      ...  
 But the kitten, how she starts,  
 Crouches, stretches, paws, and darts !"

The kitten play simultaneously with three or four leaves with remarkable skill and agility, like a conjurer, playing at a time with three or four balls or knives. This image has been admirably treated by another writer of the Romantic Age. Hazlitt draws at length the picture of one of the *Indian Jugglers* performing his show with half a dozen brass balls kept in the air by the dexterity of his hands. Here Wordsworth also, through a comparison, lightly touches upon the feats of such a fellow playing at the market place or street corner, surrounded by a big crowd clapping in admiration of his performance. The little kitten, absorbed in its pretty movements in the sheer joy of life, does not care for any applause of the by-standers :

"Quick as he in feats of art,  
 Far beyond in joy of heart,

Were her antics played in the eye  
 Of a thousand standers—by ;  
 Clapping hands with shout and stare.  
 What would little Tabby care  
 For the plaudits of the crowd ?”

Children in their relation to men, in their contact with adults, might easily provide situations of humour. But Wordsworth rarely utilizes such opportunities for comic effects. He seems to approach a congenial mood in the short sketch, *To the Rev. Robert Jones, Fellow of St. John's College, Cambridge*, in which the holy man is represented as intimate with and frolicsome in the company of children. Though belonging to the sedate priestly rank, and an Academician too, he is not grave and repelling to children : they have an easy access to him, and he is quite familiar and genial at the cottage table ; they enjoy his playful manners and he enjoys joking at them :

“Back from his sight no bashful children steal,  
 He sits a brother at the cottage meal.  
 His humble looks no shy restraint impart ;  
 Around him plays at will the virgin heart.”

By ‘virgin heart’ Wordsworth in all probability means the fresh mind of children or rustics communicating freely to the august scholar mixing with them unreservedly. But may we not strain a bit to read in “the virgin heart” a coy village maiden confiding her delicate secrets to and seeking counsel of the holy father ?

The sight of his own sporting child, however, does not throw the poet into a lightness of mood, but induces grave thoughts. Even when writing to his little daughter, Dora, Wordsworth is not found in a loving, indulgent frame of mind, as would have been natural to a father. He is with her one late summer afternoon in an arbour : she is playing freely before him. This is the situation in *The Longest Day : Addressed to my Daughter*. He enjoys the innocent sports of the child :

“Dora ! sport, as thou sportest,  
 On this platform, light and free,  
 Take thy bliss, while longest, shortest  
 Are indifferent to thee.”

But the child’s happy feeling does not inspire in the father a responsive merry mood, but yields characteristically to Wordsworthian didacticism :

“Be thou wiser, youthful Maiden !”

The philosophical father even reminds the child in her present buoyancy of spirit of the heavy thoughts of Death and God, not to be

forgotten under the lure of beauty and pleasure on all sides :

“And when thy decline shall come,  
Let not flowers, or boughs fruit-laden,  
Hide the knowledge of thy doom.

...                    ...                    ...  
Bending low before the Donor,  
Lord of heaven's unchanging year.”

As Wordsworth's poetic theme shifts from infancy and childhood to boyhood and youth, the tone of humour becomes more pronounced and frequent. The source of inspiration is now not simply innocence but rather idiocy, even maliciousness. And so the risible element often lapses into crude comicality..

In *There was a Boy* it is the innocent sport of a boy imitating the hooting of owls that provides amusement for us. The boy, aged about twelve, on many an evening, stands alone beneath the trees,

“With fingers interwoven, both hands  
Pressed closely palm to palm and to his mouth  
Uplifted, he, as through an instrument,  
Blows mimic hootings to the silent owls,  
That they might answer him.”

The owls do respond lusciously :

“And they would shout  
Across the watery vale, and shout again,  
Responsive to his call,—with quivering peals,  
And long haloos, and screams, and echoes loud,  
Redoubled and redoubled ;  
Concourse wild  
Of jocund din !”

We too are amused and smile gently at the boy's playful mimicry.

If innocence be simply pleasing, stupidity can be positively humorous. *The Idiot Boy* is a genuine comic creation of Wordsworth's fancy. It is 'an attempt to make an idiot the hero of a story.' Though it traces 'the maternal passion through many of its more subtle windings,' it is essentially a rustic mock epic. Wordsworth meant it to be an amusing poem ; he noted that he 'never wrote anything with so much glee' (A. B. Grosart : *Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, III. 27)

The mother is proud of her idiot child. Wordsworth hints at 'Betty's pride in one of his pleasant bits of humour.' She,

“Could lend out of that moment's store  
Five years of happiness or more  
To any that might need it.” (134-136).

Out of sheer idiocy the boy forgets his serious business, rambles, 'burrs', rides face backward, and would pluck a star and carry it in his pocket. He is a purely laughable figure. As Betty Foy puts him on horse-back one March evening to call the doctor for ailing Susan Gale, his lips burr in joy. Without boot or spur, John, the Idiot Boy, rides the pony and shakes a green holly bough in his hand with a funny hurly-burly. About this famous charger of Johnny Foy a contemporary reviewer said, 'a horse that thinks. ...The horses of Mars were never harnessed with such pomp, pride and circumstance' (*New Monthly Magazine XIV*).

Wordsworth intends the sight to be amusing as he describes the loving mother fondly watching the gentle 'horse move on, while her Johnny's lips go on burring loud and constant in an idiotic mechanical fashion :

"Burr, burr—now Johnny's lips they burr,  
As loud as any mill, or near it ;  
Meek as a lamb the pony moves,  
And Johnny makes the noise he loves,  
And Betty listens, glad to hear it."

The Idiot Boy is a 'natural' in the Shakespearean sense, a 'vehicle of humour like Dogberry or Don Quixote.' Johnny

"Now, perhaps, is hunting sheep,  
A fierce and dreadful hunter he." ( 327-328 )

The whole presentation is a parody of Knight-errantry.

As this merry messenger goes on his serious errand of calling the doctor from the town for the sick neighbour, he is unconscious of the gravity of the situation : he burrs chiming with the hooting owls :

"The owlets hoot, the owlets curr,  
And Johnny's lips they burr, burr, burr,  
As on he goes beneath the moon."

Johnny is such a 'half-wise', half-witted fellow that he may clean forget his job, and

"Climb an oak  
Where he will stay till he is dead."

Pity Susan Gale, even Betty Foy, as we may, we can not help being amused at Johnny's stupid antics. The worried mother leaves groaning Susan and goes in search of her brave Knight. She even rails at poor Susan for causing all the trouble by falling ill. An encounter with the doctor makes a poignantly humorous scene :

"Oh Sir ! You know I'm Betty Foy,  
And I have lost my poor dear Boy,  
You know him—him often see ;  
He's not so wise as some folks be."

"The devil take his wisdom!" said  
 The Doctor, looking somewhat grim,  
 "What, Woman! should I know of him?"  
 And, grumbling, he went back to bed." (254-261),

The imbecile child meanwhile has not gone to the doctor in the town, but he moves wildly in the down. He roams about aimlessly and climbs peaks to pluck a star from the heavens to bring it home in his pocket:

"He with his Pony now doth roam  
 The cliffs and peaks so high that are,  
 To lay his hands upon a star,  
 And in his pocket bring it home."

The poet may still retain his solemn looks, but the reader smiles spontaneously at this childish project.

Or, the funny fancy possesses him of riding the horse in a queer posture—the rider's back turned towards the bridle and his face towards the tail of the animal:

"Perhaps he's turned himself about,  
 His face unto his horse's tail,  
 And, still and mute, in wonder lost,  
 All silent as a horseman ghost,  
 He travels slowly down the vale."

A circus clown, imitating his feat, could make a galleryful of juvenile spectators burst into roaring laughter.

Or, the next moment he energises himself into a wild gallop:

"Perhaps, with head and heels on fire,  
 And like the very soul of evil,  
 He's galloping away, away,  
 And so will gallop on for aye,  
 The bane of all that dread the devil!"

At last Betty finds him out, sitting upright on his horse, feeding freely by a waterfall. The mother

"Darts, as with a torrent's force,  
 She almost has o'erturned the Horse"

( 374-375 ).

As the mother, moved emotionally on finding her lost child, holds him fast, the Idiot Boy, unaffected as ever,

"...burrs, and laughs abud."  
 And we join in the laughter.  
 As for ailing Susan, whom are neighbours left in neglect,  
 "As her mind grew worse and worse,  
 Her body—it grew better" ( 415-416 ).

And finally, miraculously healed, she too came in search of the valiant messenger. And the three were happily united.

The very impromptu nature of rhymes in the poem is itself an index of the total lack of seriousness in the poet's fancy, e.g., "fiddle-faddle : saddle", "Shocked her : Doctor"

To the pure idiocy of the boy, Johnny, Wordsworth has added a touch of maliciousness in the youth, Harry, in the little tale, *Goody Blake and Harry Gill*. His teeth chattering in all the seasons of the year and his eyes prying into the movements of his neighbour betray an unkindly heart taking a fiendish pleasure in embarrassing the aged woman.

It is a true story of a youngman who catches red-handed a poor, old neighbour stealing wood from his fencing, while collecting fuel for herself. Ethically and circumstantially it is quite a serious affair. But the picture of the youngman, his teeth chattering in chill or anger, and his hands holding fast the old dame by her arms and giving her a violent shake in the very act of thieving, becomes highly comical in effect.

Though young, he suffers from chattering teeth, winter and summer, all the year round :

"In March, December, and in July  
'Tis all the same with Harry Gill ;  
The neighbours, tell, and tell you truly,  
His teeth they chatter chatter, still."

Highly amusing is the poet's delineation of the youth's alertness in catching the thief :

"And there, at night, in frost and snow,  
He watched to seize old Goody Blake.  
And once, behind a rick of barley,  
Thus looking out did Harry stand ;

...  
He hears a noise—he's all awake—  
Again !—on tip toe down the hill  
He softly creeps—'tis Goody Blake ;

...  
Right glad was he when he beheld her ;  
Stick after stick did Goody pull :  
He stood behind a bush of elder,  
Till she had filled her apron full.  
When with her load she turned about.  
The by-way back again to take ;  
He started forward, with a shout,  
And sprang upon poor Goody Blake.

And fiercely by the arm he held her fast,  
 And fiercely by the arm he shook her,  
 And cried, "I've caught you then at last!"

The story runs like a mock-serious thriller of crime-and-detection for the amusement of juvenile readers.

Leg-pulling of or oblique hits at elderly people, for humorous effects, are not altogether rare in Wordsworth's poetry. There is, for instance, a sly hint at the Don in *To The Rev. Robert Jones, Fellow of St. John's College, Cambridge*. The dancing girls' guesses about him have an overt slant towards humour :

"While unsuspended wheels the village dance,  
 The Maidens eye him with enquiring glance,  
 Much wondering by what fit of crazing care,  
 Or desperate love, bewildered, he came *there*."

'There' obviously stands for the village dance party which he attends ; it may as well refer to the holy orders taken by him. Is he 'there', speculate the maidens, on having been jilted in love ?

Humourous too is the sketch of the tourists in *The Brothers*. The humble priest of Ennerdale speaks to Jane about tourists visiting their locality. Perhaps the holy father is himself in a serious, moralising mood. But the portraits strike us definitely in a humorous way ;

"These Tourists, heaven preserve us ! needs must live  
 A profitable life : some glance along,  
 Rapid and gay, as if the earth were air,  
 And they were butterflies to wheel about  
 Long as the Summer lasted : some as wise,  
 Perched on the forehead of a jutting crag,  
 Pencil in hand and book upon the knee,  
 Will look and scribble, scribble on and look,  
 Until a man might travel twelve stout miles,  
 Or reap an acre of his neighbour's corn."

Tourists flitting about lightly like butterflies, so long as summer lasts, may be just a picture of felicity, such as we come across everywhere in Wordsworth's poetry. But the figure of one perched on a projectory of a hill, and with a pencil in hand and a book on the knee, and for hours scribbling or sketching tends to induce a gentle smile in the reader. The portrait has a comic touch. The clever chiasmus—"look and scribble, scribble on and look"—intensifies that humorous effect with a tinge of satire.

In the section, 'The Personage' of *The Excursion*, Book VIII, the playful comparison of the Wanderer to a mediaeval Knight appears to have been instituted in a humorous tone. The Pastor invites the roving man

and his companion, the Solitary, to his house :

“But let us hence ! my dwelling is in sight,  
And there—”

The Solitary is not inclined to comply with this request ; he does not accept the invitation ; he rallies his companion, the Wanderer, and playfully draws a comparison between his itinerant profession and the way of life of the mediaeval Knight-errant :

“The Solitary shrunk. He said  
To his Compatriot, smiling as he spake,  
‘The peaceable remains of this good Knight  
Would be disturbed  
If consciousness could reach him  
That one had dared to couple...  
The fine vocation of the sword and lance  
With the gross aims and body-bending toil  
Of a poor brotherhood who walk the earth  
Pitied and despised the two estates  
Are graced with some resemblance.”

Like the Knight-errants these Itinerants also relieve and help people by

“Raising savage life  
To rustic, and the rustic to urbane.”

They give advice, carry news, soothe and console people : what greater service the Knights could render ?—

“Counsel is given ; pleasant tidings bring :  
Could the proud guest of chivalry do more ?”

The apparently serious comparison of the Wanderer with the Knight of old and the elaboration of the kind deeds done by the former are in a humorous tone. Behind the apparently innocent expression, ‘pleasant tidings bring’ lurks an unsaid joking banter at the Wanderer’s habit of spreading rumours and indulging in slanderous gossip.

Of Wordsworth’s humorous sketches of adult fools the figure of Peter Bell is a close rival of the Idiot Boy. Peter’s stupidity, the poet is convinced, is incorrigible, and cannot be cured by all the experiences of his life :

“He travelled here, he travelled there ;—  
But not the value of a hair  
Was heart or head the better.”

Wordsworth’s observation on Peter echoes Dryden’s humorous—satiric characterization of Shadwell as stupid Mac Flecknoe who never strays into sense :

“Shadwell alone of all my sons is he  
Who stands confirmed in full stupidity

The rest to some faint meaning make pretence,  
But Shadwell never deviates into sense."

Peter is a specimen not only of the unintentionally ludicrous but also of 'grim and savage humour.'

The awkwardness of Peter is aggravated by associating him with an ass, a proverbial image of stupidity. The rascal and the ass are the 'central characters' of the poem ; and it is difficult to say who is the true hero. Wordsworth draws lightly a series of funny scenes in describing Peter's encounter with a stray donkey, erratic and obstinate by the very nature of the species.

On finding a solitary ass in the wilderness, Peter shouts in joy, "A Prize !" And noticing a halter round its neck, he readily mounts on it and urges the beast to move, but in vain :

"Peter leapt  
Upon the Creature's back, and plied  
With ready heels his shaggy side ;  
But still the Ass his station kept."

Absorbed in the solemn tranquillity of the scene around in the right Wordsworthian spirit, the silly beast records his protest by shaking gently one of his long lateral appendages. There prevails silence far and near,

"Only the Ass, with motion dull,  
Upon the pivot of his skull  
Turns round his long left ear."

Wordsworth must have been a close observer of the physiognomy of the asinine species.

All efforts of Peter in instigating the beast to motion fail. A sturdy blow being administered by the rider, the Ass "Dropped gently down upon his knees", and then "With legs stretched out stiff he lay"—a grand, awkward sight, enough to make the gravest of mortals burst into laughter.

Peter is naturally provoked into a rage by this obstinacy and insubordination of the beast of burden. And the sight of an angry man is always comical. Is not the figure of over-wrought Lear in the raging storm, with its inherent pity, and all its cosmic grandeur and sublimity, just comical on the stage ? What else can be the reader's reaction to observing Peter shaking in fury ? His

"lips with fury quiver ;  
Quoth he 'you little mulish dog,  
I'll fling your carcass like a log  
Head foremost down the river !'"

And the awkwardness of the dance pose is punctuated by the quaintness of the accompanying music. Responding to Peter's cursing,

"the ass sent forth  
A long and clamorous bray!"

And as Peter applied his demoniac power to egg the beast on,  
"The Ass did lengthen out  
More ruefully a deep-drawn shout,  
The hard dry sea-saw of his horrible bray!"

Such pranks in the setting of an essentially grave and tragic tale, and in the supremely moralising story of the magic conversion of a ruffian into an honest man, are highly ludicrous and enjoyable.

At last the recalcitrant beast obeys the rider's lash. But what a disconcertingly irregular movement! The rogue of a simpleton, the Potter or Hawker of earthenware, mounted on the Ass, and started beating it furiously, now to check its wildness, and the poor beast began to groan and jump in utter desperation. Is not the situation highly comical?—

"All by the moonlight river side  
Groaned the poor Beast—alas in vain;  
The staff was raised to loftier height,  
And the blows fell with heavier might  
As Peter struck—and struck again.  
'Hold!' cried the Squire, 'against the rules  
Of common sense you're surely sinning;  
This leap is for us all too bold;  
Who Peter was, let that be told."

—He is no less a person than an august hawker of earthenware!

A little later comes the picture of Peter Bell, now dancing his round with Highland lasses, at the next moment lying beside his asses on lofty Cheviot Hill:

"And Peter, by the mountain-rills,  
Had danced his round with Highland lasses;  
And he had lain beside his asses  
On lofty Cheviot Hill."

It is a portrait not simply of a merry chap but also of a comical fool. The very rhyming of 'lasses' with 'asses' has a mild ring of humour about it.

Both wildness and comicality must there be in the poet's mind when he characterizes Peter as a chastiser of a dozen wives, none of whom dares approach him in fear of his roughness or for his solid stupidity!—

"Of all that lead a lawless life,  
Of all that love their lawless lives,  
In city or in village small,  
He was the wildest far of all;—  
Nay start not!—wedded wives—and twelve!

But how one wife could e'er come near him,  
In simple truth I can not tell."

Wordsworth had actually heard of a man who had twelve wives. 'What was to him factual becomes comic material in the matrix of his poem'. Peter's dozen wives remind one of the multiple marital experiences of Chaucer's Wife of Bath.

Both *Peter Bell* and *Goody Blake and Harry Gill* are illustrations of the strain of bitter comedy in Wordsworth's humour. 'It combines an awareness of active evil with the comic vision. It is at once sophisticated and grotesque'.

Of old people cutting comical figures Goody Blake, caught in the very act of thieving, blends pity with humour. Her male counterpart is met in old Daniel in *The Two Thieves ; or the Last Stage of Avarice*, an amusing sketch of two ill-sorted kleptomaniacs.

It is a tale of an old man of over ninetythree and his little grandson of three. The innocence of childhood and the dotage of senility naturally provide humour of the simplest and purest kind. The poet introduces the couple of thieves in a mock-serious tone :

"The one, yet unbreeched, is not three birthdays old,  
His Grandsire that age more than thirtytimes told."

This unequal pair enters into a partnership in thieving :

"There are ninety good seasons of fair and foul weather  
Between them, and both go a-pilfering together."

And what might be the covetable booties of such peerless pilferers ? These were, curiously enough, the most petty trifles, like small chips of timber, scattered from the carpenter's filings, or little handfuls of soil picked from heaps dumped before a neighbour's door :

"With chips is the carpenter strewing his floor ?  
Is a cartload of turf at an old woman's door ?  
Old Daniel his hand to the treasure will slide !  
And his Grandson's as busy at work by his side."

And how much does the poet enjoy, and lets the reader share his joy, in visualizing the aged pilferers *modus operandi*, his sleight of hand in the business !—

"Old Daniel begins ; he stops short—and his eye,  
Through the lost look of dotage, is cunning and shy."

They are out in their venture quite early in the day, and the people of the locality are amused at the very sight of these strange comrades at their work :

"The pair sally forth hand in hand : ere the sun  
Has peered o'er the beeches, their work is begun ;

They through the streets with deliberate tread,  
 And each, in his turn becomes leader or led ;  
 And, wherever they carry their plots and their wiles,  
 Every face in the village is dimpled with smiles".

And we smile too in amused tolerance when an aggrieved neighbour complains, perhaps more in jest than in earnest, to their kindhearted natural guardian, the senile sire's daughter and the tiny child's mother, who, let us imagine, takes both the culprits severely to task and renders three-fold recompense to the wronged ! This idea of making good the petty depredations of dotage and infancy is naturally born of Wordsworth's innate moralising tendency.

But the most enjoyable humour at the cost of an aged man comes in a joking reference to an old man in his dotage doing *female service* to the infant son of his declining years. Whenever a child comes into a scene, the serious poet in Wordsworth suspends his gravity of mood for a moment, and indulges a little in a lighter vein, himself smiling gently and bringing a soft smile on the reader's lips. *Michael* is a thoroughly pathetic tale. Still it affords the poet one flickering moment of amusement in describing the old shepherd's over-solicitude in attending upon the infant son of his old age, doing to the baby 'female service' with untrained hands, not as young fathers do in sport :

"For often times  
 Old Michael, while he [ Luke ] was a babe in arms,  
 Had done him female service, not alone  
 For pastime and delight, as is the use of fathers."

At this casual reference to 'female service' we guess and smile. And the contrast to other ( ? younger ) fathers doing this sort of work 'for pastime and delight' is unfailing in its humorous hit.

Wordsworth's normal mood as a poet is imaginative and reflective, always, serene, whether matter-of-fact or dreamy or remote and transcendental. But at odd moments his fancy plays tricks, touching the varied chords of humour, ranging from the purely farcical or physically ludicrous to a shrewd intellectual perception of incongruities; bordering on satire, from ballad simplicity and gaiety to serious thoughtfulness, even cynicism.

Here is a scene physically farcical in *The Waggoner*, III. A donkey, kicking behind, is glorified as saluting with hind legs :

"The Ass, uplifting a hind hoof,  
 Salutes the Mastiff on the head ;  
 And so were better manners bred,  
 And all was calm and quieted."

This representation of a vulgar act in refined language smacks of an

Elianish relish in a funny scene. This whimsical comedy is appropriately dedicated to Charles Lamb, since Wordsworth here keeps the obvious moral of the poem, the perils of alcoholism, under control. The veteran lover of wine, old Benjamin, has always dropped into his favourite inn, 'Dove and Olive Bough'. But now the place, having lost its old character, has no longer any fascination for him : it is now converted into 'Dove Cottage', the sober home of a 'water-drinking Bard,' a decline at which the Waggoner

"Shrugs his shoulders, shakes his head,  
And, for the honest folks within,  
It is a doubt with Benjamin  
Whether they be alive or dead!" ( i. 66-69 ).

Many of Wordsworth's scenes with children pick up the tone of nursery rhymes. So are the following : a child enjoying the sight of frogs leaping ( in *Loving and Liking* ), a kitten playing with falling leaves ( in *The Kitten and Falling Leaves* ), and a child assuming a grave, chastising look ( in *Characteristics of a Child Three Years Old* ). Or, it is a playful fantasy of a figure sailing in a queer-shaped boat through the clouds and laughing at observers on the ground below, such as we meet in the Prologue to *Peter Bell*. This sailor in the crescent-tipped canoe who laughs at the pointed horns of his vessel till his ribs ache, has descended directly from the Disney Land of the fairy tale world :

"There's something in a flying horse,  
There's something in a huge balloon,  
But through the clouds I'll never float  
Until I have a little Boat,  
Shaped like the crescent-moon.  
But if perchance your faith should fail,  
Look up—and you shall see me soon !  
Meanwhile untroubled I admire  
The pointed horns of my canoe ;  
And, did not pity touch my breast,  
To see how ye are all distrest,  
Till my ribs ached, I'd laugh at you."

There is ballad-like simplicity and gaiety too in *Peter Bell* and *The Idiot Boy*, and simplicity minus gaiety, with innocence added, in *We are Seven*.

Purely intellectual humour or wit, a special characteristic of eighteenth century verse, is not normally expected in Wordsworth's poetry. But once or twice he has created a situation with critical consciousness of the lack of proportion or balance in the conduct of people, almost exposing themselves to ridicule. It is possible to be seriously attentive to one

thing and foolishly careless in other matters simultaneously, like the fabled philosopher looking upto the sky and studying the stars, while walking on the earth and blindly falling into a well.

John E. Jordan cites *Power of Music* as a humorous sketch in which Wordsworth's persistent didactic drive proves too strong for him to resist the temptation to editorialize! It is, according to him, a pleasantly humorous picture of a London street musician, that suggests a moral :

“An Orpheus! an Orpheus! Yes, Faith may grow bold,  
And take to herself all the wonders of old ;—  
Near the stately Pantheon you'll meet with the same  
In the street that from Oxford hath borrowed its name.” ( 1-4 ).

It is as well possible to interpret Wordsworth's *Power of Music*, like Dryden's *St. Cecilia's Day*, as a serious poem, celebrating the power of music, to which the former, unlike his predecessor, gives a humorous twist; while the earlier poet sustains dignity of tone all through the poem, the Romantic poet suffers his verse to land into the ludicrous. A musician plays in Oxford Street. Every passer-by, captivated by the power of music, neglects his or her errand, and listens to the tune with rapt attention. The tone of the poet, serious enough at the start, glides into a lighter mood towards the end :

“The Newsman is stopped, though he stops on the fret ;  
And the half-breathless Lamp-lighter—he is in the net !  
The Porter sits down on the weight which he bore ;  
The Lass with her barrow wheels hither her store ;—  
If a thief could be here he might pilfer at ease.”

The total absorption in music and the resultant opportunity for thieving make the situation comical.

A rare kind of humour, not resembling those categorised so far, is approached in Wordsworth's little piece, *To The Spade of a Friend*. Born of a heightened treatment of a petty trifle, it does not, however, rise as high as a mock-heroic poem. It has not the slightest touch of satire, and the mood is not sustained.

The poet speculates on the next master of a simple agricultural implement, a spade, when its present owner dies :

“Who shall inherit Thee  
When death has laid  
Low in the darksome cell thine own dear lord ?  
That man will have a trophy  
Nobler than a conqueror's sword.  
Thou monument of peaceful happiness !”

There is speculation too on the fate of the spade when it will no longer

remain service-worthy. Will it be thrown away ignominiously in the obscurity of an ante-room into a heap of useless lumber? No, it is to be fondly preserved as a precious heraldic trophy in an honoured place in the rustic dwelling:

“And, when thou art past service, worn away,  
No dull oblivious nook shall hide thy fate,  
An heir loom in his cottage wilt thou be :  
High will he hang thee up, well pleased to adorn  
His rustic chimney with the last of Thee !”

Sometimes Wordsworth indulges in the mock-heroic, as in the parody of Nelson's military adventure in Section ii of *The Waggoner*. Here the sailor improvises a wheeled model of *The Vanguard*, Nelson's flagship at the Battle of Nile, which he demonstrates in the fashion of Corporal Trim. When the bosom pair start out again, they soon tether the sailor's ass, dragging the model ship, behind the Waggon, so that now they have THE VANGUARD, following close behind. (ii. 68).

‘The impulse to parody turns to the mock-heroic. Benjamin is called a Conqueror, and despite a series of admonitory omens he is finally the victim of malicious Fates. He is surrounded by a protective mist’ such as

“Never golden-haired Apollo,  
Pleased some favourite chief to follow.” (iv. 108-109)

The Poet calls upon his Muse, and indulges in a heightened language:

“Now, heroes, for the true commotion,  
The triumph of your late devotion  
Can aught on earth impede delight,  
Still mounting to a higher height ;  
And higher still—a greedy flight !  
Can any low-born care pursue her,  
Can any mortal clog come to her ?” (iii. 22-28)

‘The mock-heroic strain, this ironic tongue-in-cheek tone, appears in many of Wordsworth's lines, occasionally even in poems essentially serious’.

Heightened treatment glorifies a little fly in *Written in Germany*. The ‘disconsolate creature’,

“His spindles sink under him, foot, leg, and thigh !  
His eyesight and hearing are lost ;  
Between life and death his blood freezes and thaws :  
And his two pretty pinions of blue dusky gauze  
Are glued to his sides by the frost.” (21-25).

In *The Contrast* a similar heightened treatment is given to a simple parrot. So in *The Excursion*, V, a mighty uproar is heard in the hills. It must be

made by a 'bold hero' doing some adventurous exploit. What an anticlimax when the imagined hero turns out to be just a boy pushing rocks over a cliff. (436-438). There is also here an 'account of courtship couched in highfown nautical terminology so that the romance weathers currents, rocks, shoals, cross winds, and squalls.'

If Wordsworth does not indulge in satirical humour, in a stray passage in *Inscriptions supposed to be found in and near a Hermit's Cell* he betrays an attitude of half-humorous and half-serious cynicism. Are the characterizations of Hope, Fear, Glory, Friendship, Youth and Peace conceived in the hermit's ascetic cynicism and renunciation of the material world? Or, does this pretended tone of disgust and disillusionment proceed from a lighter, humorous vein in the poet? All these high abstractions confront us perpetually as mighty forces besetting us with baffling problems at every step of life. Yet how lightly are these dressed in delicate and telling imagery!—

"What is truth?—a stuff rejected;  
Duty?—an unwelcome clog;  
Joy?—a moon by fits reflected  
In a swamp or watery bog."

The ironic variety of Wordsworth's humour perilously verges on satire. While indulging in wit, it tends rather easily to verbal play and has less 'comic warmth'. *Rob Roy's Grave* is such 'a jovial poem with an ironic bite to it':

"A famous man is Robin Hood,  
The English ballad-singer's joy!  
And Scotland has a thief as good."

*Rob Roy* followed 'the simple plan':

"That they should take, who have the power,  
And they should keep who can."

From innocence to idiocy, from a soft, sympathetic smile at human frailties to a shrewd shrug at individual idiosyncrasy or mischievousness, from crude farcicality to subtle insinuations, from light fairy fancy to grave cynicism approaching satire—it presents a complete cycle in the evolution of Wordsworth's lighter vein, parallel to the progress of the poet's soul from Romantic imagination and hopefulness to utter despair and disillusionment.

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## CONTENTS

---

DICKENS THE CONJURER	...	...	...	1
S. C. Sen				
DICKENS AND HIS MODERN READERS	.	..	...	14
Poppy Aiyyar				
DICKENS: SOME RECENT APPROACHES	.	...	...	18
Krishna Ghosh				
DICKENS'S TREATMENT OF CHILD-PSYCHOLOGY—AND DAVID COPPERFIELD ..	...	..	...	26
Narayan Saha				
OF GASTRONOMICAL HUMOUR IN DICKENS AND IN OTHERS	.	..	...	29
K. Lahiri				
IMAGE AND SYMBOL IN DICKENS*	...	..	...	41
Amitabha Sinha				
THE ADULT WORLD OF 'DOMBEY AND SON' ...	..	..	..	59
Shanta Mahalanobis				
A POST-COLONIAL PERSPECTIVE ON DICKENS AND SOCIETY	...	...	...	72
Sajni Kripalani				
WORDSWORTH: A MAN SPEAKING TO MEN ...	..	..	..	81
Dipendu Chakrabarty				

## OUR CONTRIBUTORS

S. C. SEN, M.A. Ph.D. (Cal.), M.Litt. (Cantab.), for many years Senior Reader at the Calcutta University, was afterwards Professor of English, Visva Bharati University, is a distinguished critic of English fiction.

POPPY AIYYER, M.A. (Madras), formerly Professor of English and Principal of Shri Shikshayatan, Calcutta, is now the Director of U.S. Educational Foundation in India, Calcutta.

KRISHNA GHOSH, M.A. (Cal.), on the staff of Loreto Convent, is a keen student of Dickens.

NARAYAN SAHA, M.A. (Cal.), formerly of the Darjeeling Govt. College, is now teaching English in Goenka College, Calcutta, has been studying Victorian fiction.

K. LAHIRI, M.A. (Cal.), Senior Reader in the Post-Graduate Department of English, Calcutta University, is a well-known scholar and writer.

AMITABHA SINHA, M.A., D.Phil. (Cal.), Lecturer in the Kalyani University, has specialised in Victorian fiction.

SHANTA MAHALANOBIS, M.A. (Cal. & Cantab), teaches English in Lady Brabourne College and the University Post-Graduate Department.

SAJNI KRIPALANI, B.A. (Hons.), (Cal. & Oxon), is on the staff of Lady Brabourne College.

DIPENDU CHAKRABARTY, M.A. (Cal.), a member of the University's Post-Graduate Department, has distinguished himself as a critic.

## DICKENS THE CONJURER

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S. C. SEN

### I

THE late Mr Edwin Muir observed in a piece of perceptive criticism what gave value to Micawber's oft-repeated words 'in case anything turned up' and those of Mrs Micawber 'I never will desert Mr Micawber': To bring home the contrast between these expressions and the—words put into the mouth of a character by a writer of this century he referred to a novel the hero of which said constantly, 'I'll plough up the bit of gorse'. Muir pointed out that the characters of the nineteenth century novelist repeated what had once expressed a true personal feeling but the later novelist made his character utter a sentiment conveying a social image, which was very different from a personal feeling. As a result of this he did not succeed in making the words sound authentic in the mouth of his hero.

We shall quote a few other examples from Dickens, which will reveal how the novelist exploited the technique without falling into the error which the more recent writer committed and thereby produced a caricature rather than a living character. Mrs Gummidge ( in *David Copperfield* ) says, 'I am a lone lorn creetur...and everythink goes contrary with me'. To this class will also belong Uriah Heep's words 'We are so very 'umble' but these latter have certain other implications, which are worth a comment.

Uriah Heep realized the lowliness of his station and did not like to quarrel with it. With an adroitness to which surely life offers parallels he set about using humility as a mask for his ambition, which later manifested itself in a criminal form. He was guarding himself against envy, which as Helmut Shoeck ( in "Der Neid, Eine Theorie der Gesellschaft" ) has tried to show after an exhaustive inquiry will flourish even in the most egalitarian society, so ingrained is it in human nature and for Uriah Heep this concealment was essential to the success of his wicked plans. He describes how this 'umbleness' came to be a part and parcel of his nature. In this statement he may be telling the truth :

"When I was quite a little boy, said Uriah, "I got to know what umbleness did, and I took to it. I ate umble pie with an appetite. I sotpped at the umble point of my learning, and says I, 'Hold hard !'

'When you offered to teach me Latin, I knew better'. 'People like to be above you', says father, 'keep yourself down'. I am very umble to the present moment, Master Copperfield, but I've got a little power'.

Characters like Micawber and Mrs. Micawber are designated as flat characters in the critical language applied by learned scholars. The word belongs to the sphere of painting where its use has an obvious justification in terms of the medium and the result it produces. For labelling characters in a novel or play it does not seem to have an equal measure of success. In life no-one has a flat character in the painterly sense. It is of course true that some make a greater impression than others and it is certain that if we met Mr or Mrs Micawber in actual life we would not have spoken of flatness as their distinctive quality.

But I am not perhaps just to the critical position. For the term does not detract from the character to which it is applied whereas flatness may easily be insipidity and a mode of denunciation. I wish to point out that even when it is used with right critical precision it is far from apposite as a label for any character. What the novelist does with regard to such characters is to draw them with a single masterly stroke and it is the sharpness of the delineation that we admire and we are not therefore rewarded if we borrow from painting a word which half buries the impression.

The characteristic of the Dickensian world is that it bustles with life and although the author does not offer what we may describe as a philosophical attitude, we can hardly allege this against him as deficiency. For the vitality is so triumphant that all darkness is swept out of the mind. In this respect we may say that Dickens has found that for him and for his men and women there is no need for the consolations of philosophy. The following passage (which is certainly not one of the gloomiest in Dickens) we may find some corroboration for the statement :

"I have known him (Micawber) come home to supper with a flood of tears, and a declaration that nothing was now left but a jail; and go to bed making a calculation of the expense of putting bow-windows to the house, 'in case anything turned up', which was his most favourite expression."

We have no reason to regret that Dickens is so often content to be unphilosophical. His attitude is the reverse of Edward Youngs (in his "Night Thoughts") :

To know the world, not love her, is thy point ;  
She gives but little, nor that little, long.

Dickens had an endless curiosity for the world, which meant for him, the

London of his day. Even when he contemplated misery and suffering, he did not condemn life as its source.

## II

The novels of Dickens are well known and to write about them at this late hour may be profitless except in so far the attempt may lead to a revival of the pleasures which all readers of Dickens have known. I am, therefore, taking up his "Sketches by Boz Illustrative of Every-day Life and Every-day People", for making a few observations as the work does not appear to have received much critical attention and may therefore offer an opportunity for making a few remarks which will not be altogether stale. It is not to be wondered at that even this early and comparatively obscure work has not failed to stimulate some writers of the present century. For an authentic observer of life, such as Dickens was, would always delight the reader and aid creative work in the future. Such testimony of a later time is a significant confirmation of artistic achievement. We shall quote a few sentences from *Sketches By Boz* (Ch. III) :

The four Miss Willises were courted in due form by...Mr Robinson... the neighbours were perfectly frantic in their anxiety to discover which of the four Miss Willises was the fortunate fair...the difficulty they experienced in solving the problem was not at all lessened by the announcement of the eldest Miss Willis,—“We are going to marry Mr Robinson”...

“The old gentlemen of silkworm notoriety did not hesitate to express his decided opinion that Mr Robinson was of Eastern descent, and contemplated marrying the whole family at once”.

It will be hardly an exaggeration to say that Mr Charles Lee's “Mr Sampson”, a play in one act, is almost entirely based upon Dickens's account of *The Four Sisters*, from which the above passage has been quoted. There are however only two sisters (Catherine Stevens and Caroline Stevens) in this drama both of whom are wooed by their paying guest Mr Sampson. He cannot at the end make up his mind as to whom to choose : “The pair of 'e rolled up together 'ud make a complete masterpiece ; a man couldn't look for a better wife than what the two of 'e 'ud make. That's where 'tis ; nor I can't see no way out of it—not in a Christian country. (Meditatively). Ah ! These heathen Turks—they know a thing or two after all, don't they ?” Even the name Sampson is quite close in sound to Dickens's Robinson.

The next comment I shall make is about a case of probable influence, which I do not think, is capable of being proved. I am thinking of T.S. Eliot's poem “Rhapsody on a Windy Night” in which the hours of the night—Twelve o' clock, Half-past one, Half-past two, Half-past three

and Four o' clock—are associated in the poet's mind with certain sights in London Streets. Eliot's approach is psychological and is based upon some features of city-life, which offer an earlier projection of his 'West-Land'. In Dickens ("Sketches by Boz"), Chapter II is about "The Street-Night". His observations are also made hour-wise: "It is nearly eleven o' clock, and the cold rain which has been drizzling so long, is beginning to pour down in good earnest". "One o' Clock! Parties returning from the different theatres foot it through the muddy streets". "Scenes like these are continued until three or four o'clock in the morning; and even when they close, fresh ones open to the inquisitive novice".

What I think can be claimed in behalf of Dickens is that he has suggested an area of observation and has taken the night as his temporal background for the purpose. London of 1836 is very different from London about a hundred years later apart from the fact that Dickens and Eliot are as different as two human beings can be. There is also the fact that one does not write the same things in verse as one does in prose. When these circumstances are conceded I think we shall still find some indication of influence which cannot be easily denied.

### III

To see what the book says is of course an important method of approach for assessment of its value; another is to observe how it says it. I shall make an attempt at this twofold approach avoiding the implication that I am about to enter a field with which the readers are unacquainted. There is always something to be said in favour of a new witness who endeavours to place on record his experience honestly.

The first section of "Boz" is called "Our Parish" and is divided into seven chapters. The picture of the parish occasionally recalls the primordial state of innocence although it will not be correct to assume that it was the author's governing attitude when he wrote it. In Chapter I, "The Beadle", there was a case of a chimney on fire. A parish-fire engine was requisitioned to deal with the situation. The operators did not know how to use it. Their innocence was amusing, not ridiculous, for sophistication is advance but how can there be advance on perfection?

"Bang went the pumps—the people cheered—the beadle perspired profusely; but it was unfortunately discovered, just as they were going to put the fire out, that nobody understood the process by which the engine was filled with water: and that eighteen boys, and a man, had exhausted themselves in pumping for twenty minutes, without producing the slightest effect!"

. The next Chapter "The Curate" also emphasizes the element of inno-

cence : people are not yet tied to external standards as in a sophisticated society in which their outward reaction is always predictable. They behave as they feel and their spontaneity contradicts the social "OUGHTS", developed as a kind of fifth sense under artificial conditions : "Our curate is a young gentleman of such prepossessing appearance, and fascinating manners, that within one month after his first appearance in the parish, half the young-lady inhabitants were melancholy with religion, and the other half desponding with love". 'Melancholy' supposed to be due to an excess of 'black bile', produces among other things, peevishness which may be no more than a form of jealousy. The interpretation may appear objectionable on the ground of its ingenuity but when one understands the spirit the author infuses into the scenes, one will not find the view far-fetched or fanciful. For an introduction to this spirit I shall quote a rather long passage from Ch. IV ("The Election for the Beadle") : "This was the state of affairs in our parish a week or two since, when Simmons, the beadle, suddenly died. The lamented deceased had over-exerted himself, a day or two previously, in conveying an aged female, highly intoxicated, to the strong room of the workhouse. The excitement thus occasioned, added to a severe cold, which this indefatigable officer had caught in his capacity of director of the parish engine, by inadvertently playing over himself instead of a fire, proved too much for a constitution already enfeebled by age ; and the intelligence was conveyed to the Board one evening that Simmons had died, and left his respects".

"Left his respects", the three words which conclude the above passage, are a master-stroke and reveal the author's comic spirit, which may be singled out as a peculiar trait of his genius, which generations of readers have admired most.

The election of the beadle brought two competitors into close conflict. The slogans cried on the occasion were "Timkins for Beadle. Nine small children !!! "But his rival had better claims to public affection having a larger family :" Spriggins for Beadle. Ten small children (two of them twins), and a wife !!! "The infatuated public was little inclined to consider that Bung (or Timkins) could easily have a larger family than Spriggins who was fifty, being then only thirty-five. A little cunning however saved poor Timkins from defeat. In fact, he polled a considerable majority of votes." A great many ladies who were walking leisurely up to the church—for it was a very hot day—to vote for Spriggins, were artfully decoyed into the coaches, and voted for Bung". In spite of the manoeuvre which led to Bung's spectacular victory—the majority attained by him "on the gross poll was four hundred and twenty-eight," the parish still remained a kind of Garden Utopia for us.

There are several exercises in the art of story-telling. They are none of them on an ambitious scale and most design a particular effect, which is modestly realized as Dickens does not seem in them to aim at anything more than comic laughter. A few tell of suffering and death caused by drunkenness, crime and self-indulgence. I think, they belong to an inferior class and betray a tendency to sentimentality, which cannot hold the stage in a more critical and self-conscious world.

The examples are chosen from the section of "Boz" devoted to "Tales".

Cornelius Brook Dingwall, Esq., M. P., discovering that his daughter is about to contract a secret marriage with an undesirable person, sends her to a private boarding school where, he thought, she would be out of reach of her pursuer but contrary to this expectation the young man had free access to the dances and parties organized by the school and he met the girl there on the very day of her arrival and eloped with her shortly afterwards. When Miss Cromptons of Minerva House broke the news to the father he found consolation from a logical formulation at which he arrived after a brief reflection: He "was reluctantly compelled to admit that the untoward result of his admirable arrangements was attributable, not to Miss Cromptons, but his own diplomacy. He however consoles himself, like some other diplomats, by satisfactorily proving that if his plans did not succeed, they ought to have done so." If the father is an eccentric logic-chopper, the daughter is little likely to make anyone happy or give her lover a sense of having won a treasure, which he could cherish for long. This is the character given to her by the author: "Miss Brook Dingwall was one of that numerous class of young ladies who, like adverbs, may be known by their answering to a commonplace question, and doing nothing else." (Ch. III). The analogy "like adverbs" seems puzzling but we can see that no compliment is meant by the words.

The next tale occurs in Ch. IV and is an account of the Tuggses at Ramsgate—They come into a little fortune by good luck and plan to live more comfortably. In the course of a journey they meet handsome Captain Waters and his handsomer wife Mrs. Waters. The husband and wife put their heads together and the Tuggs youth Joseph infatuated by the married woman's good looks is made the target of a conspiracy, which succeeds easily. The Tuggses were as a result blackmailed to the extent of £ 1500. This story shows that Dickens was not ready to think of army men in the way Thackersay thought about them. Of the achievement of the British army and British diplomats his novels tell us little to their credit.

Another tale in Ch. V is about a man called Horatio Sparkins, who

carried himself about with so much loftiness of manner and who frequently mentioned members of the British Aristocracy with such easy familiarity that some of his admirers concluded that he, too, belonged to the same rank. The Malderton family who idolized the hero one day visited a cheap shop, a little nervous that their aristocratic acquaintance might by some chance discover them there and perhaps refuse to have further dealings with them. But as the saying is, the boot was on the other foot. For they met Sparkins under his real name as Mr Samuel Smith being no more than an assistant at the same cheap shop. However much the shock of the discovery, snobbery is an incurable affliction and we are told that "the family have the same predilection for aristocratic personages, with an increased aversion to anything *low*."

In Chapter VII there is a tale, the scene being laid in East Indies, a term often loosely applied to India. It is told by a Captain who claimed to have visited the country but his narrative is obviously a figment of imagination and no fact seems to tally with actual conditions. I give a short excerpt : "When I was in the East Indies", replied the captain—( here was a discovery—he had been in the East Indies ! )—"When I was in the East Indies, I was once stopping a few thousand miles up the country, on a visit at the house of a very particular friend of mine, Ram Chowdar Doss Azuph Al Bowlar—a devilish pleasant fellow. As we were enjoying our hookahs one evening, in the cool verandah in front of his villa, we were rather surprised by the sudden appearance of thirty-four of his Kit-ma-gars ( for he had a large establishment there ), approaching the house with a threatening aspect, and beating a tom-tom." Ram Chowdar's countenance, we are told, assumed a most frightful appearance ; "his whole visage was distorted, and his frame shaken by violent emotions, 'Do you see the gum-gum ?' said he." The climax is reached at this point and the story does not proceed further. One of the listeners, Hardy, observed that he thought that a gum-gum had very much the same meaning as a humbug but the threads of the exciting story having snapped, no attempt was made to resume the tale. The hookah, the tom-tom, the kit-ma-gars and the gum-gum supplied the local colour and Hardy's sceptical interpretation could not rob the audience of the excitement, and expectancy for a further measure of the intoxicating Eastern drug.

But these tales with their far-ranging interests are the work of a young journalist. They are pot-boilers but as their author is Dickens, they often rise above the standard of hack-work and show that rightly speaking they are sign-posts for the way onward where the great achievements of the future lay.

## IV

The proud city of London, once the centre of a great Empire in which the sun never set had also humble passages in her history, which proclaim her kinship with small towns and lowly cities where nothing very memorable happened and where no power ever installed itself to take control of human destiny. In Dickens we come across a view of the great Capital, which has faded from human memory and is hardly seen elsewhere with an equal measure of vividness. Here for example is a scene of swarming life combined with a simplicity, which is no longer found in the West : "Numbers of men and women (principally the latter), carrying upon their heads heavy baskets of fruit, toil down the park side of Piccadilly, on their way to Covent Garden, and, following each other in rapid succession, form a long straggling line from thence to the turn of the road at Knightsbridge" (*Boz, Scenes, Ch. I.*). Again a few lines later : "Here and there, a briklayer's labourer, with the day's dinner tied up in a handkerchief, walks briskly to his work, and occasionally a little knot of three or four school boys on a stolen bathing expedition rattle merrily over the pavement, their boisterous mirth contrasting forcibly with the demeanour of the little sweep, who, having knocked and rung till his arm aches, and being interdicted by a merciful legislature from endangering his lungs by calling out, sits patiently down on the door-step, until the housemaid may happen to awake".

There is a great volume of social history embedded in these facts. It may be asked if it is proper in a literary study to turn to such facts. For what value can they have in relation to literature ? The objection cannot always be overruled but Dickens was more interested in the larger picture of society than in that of individual men and women. In all his master-pieces of fiction London is a felt presence : a sense of throbbing, animated existence which invades individual life at many levels and communicates a meaning to it.

What trivial innovations led to alarming conflicts ! Here is an example : "We marked the advance of civilisation, and beheld it with a sigh. The eating-house-keeper who manfully resisted the innovation of table-cloths, was losing ground every day, as his opponent gained it, and a deadly feud sprung up between them (*Boz, Scenes, Ch. IV.*)".

Where the tempo of progress is slow every change is marked and the disappearance of the old may be a just occasion for a sigh, even when what is offered in its place is an improvement.\* A writer may sigh in such

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\* A. N. Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* : "The time-span of important change was considerably longer than that of a single human life. Thus mankind was trained to adapt itself to fixed conditions. Today, this time-span is considerably shorter than that of human life, and accordingly, our training must prepare individuals to face a novelty of conditions."

a world of slow change with the assurance that he will have the sympathy of his readers, who will often share his regret. It is different now: for change comes with the power of a tidal bore and sweeps everything before it and we have hardly the time to be familiar with the new scene . when it is changed again. In this situation to sigh over a change is an absurd gesture. If there is a new Dickens, he can hardly spend any time sighing over the past.

## V

Dickens writes frequently about hackney-coaches and their drivers. Their frequency is not conditioned by the nature of the tale he tells. There are times when one feels that he cannot properly dip into the bustle of the city's life without a bout of hackney-coaches, which overcarry the passenger, throw him out of the seat right into the street or are overturned. The coach-horses and horses in general play pranks, which seemed to give Dickens opportunities for comic observations, some of which still retain their freshness. Some puns also owe to the source but one cannot always claim that they hit the mark. Here is one (*Boz. CH. VII*) which does not seem so inept : "What an interesting book a hackney-coach might produce, if it could carry as much in its head as it does in its body ! Thet autobiography of a broken-down hackney-coach would surely be as amusing as the autobiography of a broken-down hackneyed dramatist".

Closely related to the above is an account we read under the title "Meditations in Monmouth Street" (*Boz. CH. VI*), which also serves to draw attention to a talent he possessed in an eminent degree. This was the art of conjuring up. As he thought of conjuring up the autobiography of the hackney-coach, in the same spirit he applied this gift to the interpretation of the ownership and history of cast-off clothes, giving evidence of his revealing sympathy with things inanimate. To understand the point better a little introduction may not be out of place.

The above-mentioned chapter begins with the words : "We have always entertained a particular attachment towards Monmouth Street, as the only true and real emporium for second-hand wearing apparel". The author enjoys being in this region, where he can indulge a pleasant reverie on the past : "We love to walk among those extensive groves of the illustrious dead, and to indulge in the speculations to which they give rise". He was trying to fit a pair of lace-up boots on an ideal personage when his eyes happened to alight on a few suits of clothes ranged outside a shop-window. He had a sort of hunch that they belonged to and were worn by the same individual. "The idea seemed a fantastic one, and we looked at the clothes again with a firm determination not to be easily led away.

No, we are right ; the more we looked, the more we were convinced of the accuracy of our previous impression. There was the man's whole life written as legibly on those clothes, as if he had his autobiography engrossed on parchment before us".

Thus there is a secondary life; which does not die with a man and tells his history after he is no more in a mute language, which requires the conjurer's art to interpret and of this art Dickens was a master.

No account of a Dickens's achievement can omit a reference to his indebtedness to the Seventeenth Century Writers of Charactry like Hall, Overbury, Earle and others. What they tell us about men and women in their brief sketches is often entertaining and testifies to a power of abstraction, which we can hardly underrate even when they fail to meet our demand for visualization. For the attributes are a bundle of qualities and are not embodied in a human being whom we can see or hear. This is also in many cases Dickens's own technique of presentation, of which "Sketches by Boz" offer numerous examples beside those to be found in the author's later work. I shall examine some of these as illustrating a mode, which does not seem to be favoured by writers of our time, not because the exploration is so complete as to leave no scope for later practitioners but because fashions in literature impose themselves upon the human imagination as powerfully as those in sartorial art. Perhaps some speculations may also be offered by way of explaining why Dickens oscillated between the concrete and the abstract style of presentation, often preferring the latter.

In "Sketches by Boz", CH. XI, we have an account of a Christening in which the uncle Mr Dumps is to officiate as god-father and make a speech. He did not readily accept the invitation as he deliberately avoided contact even with his closest relations. His character is described in the following terms : "He could hardly be said to hate anything in particular, because he disliked everything in general ; but perhaps his greatest antipathies were cabs, old women, doors that would not shut, musical amateurs, and omnibus cads". He played his role at the ceremony meeting several obstacles on his way, which seemed to suggest that the fates did not shape him to act the part of a god-father. Yet he kept his promise and came in time to be present at the function and fulfil his obligation as the child's god-father. He delivered his sentiments on the occasion of the ceremony and in doing so gave free expression to a sardonic element in his nature. 'I hope and trust, ladies and gentlemen', he said, ...that this young and now *apparently* healthy form may not be wasted by lingering disease...that he may live to be a comfort and blessing to his parents...But should he not be what we could wish—should he forget in after times the duty which he

owes to them—should they unhappily experience that distracting truth, “how sharper than a serpent’s tooth it is to have a thankless child”.... The family of Mr Kitterbell with this experience of christening decided to have nothing further to do with this uncle. They had other children later on and for the office of god-father two conditions were imposed : “He must bind himself, by a solemn obligation, not to make any speech after supper ; and it is indispensable that he should be in no way connected with “the most miserable man in the world”.

The next reference will be to a section of “The Mudfog and Other Sketches”, entitled “Public Life of Mr Tulrumbel”. He was a well-known coal-dealer and when the Mayor Sniggs died he was appointed in his place. During the six weeks he held office, he cancelled licence to ‘Jolly Boatmen’ which had a kitchen, a bar and tap-room and offered entertainment to hundreds of people. The new Mayor looked askance at the organization believing it to be a source of crime and immorality. But he soon found that he himself could not do without cakes and ale. He made peace with this merry public by ordering the very largest-sized bowl of hot punch, with an unlimited number of pipes. For he had also prohibited music and dancing. A statement expressing the Mayor’s saner attitude ran : “It is to be hoped that this might act as reminder to the Tulrumbles of another sphere, that puffed-up conceit is not dignity, and that snarling at the little pleasures they were once glad to enjoy, because they would rather forget the times when they were of lower station, renders them objects of contempt and ridicule”.

This account makes the coal-dealer who became Mayor and resigned his office quite a living creature. The other tales leave the characters shadowy. I shall give below a list of a dozen sketches with their titles : a consideration of the author’s attitude will lead to an inference which we shall offer at the end :

The Young Couple. The Formal Couple. The Loving Couple. The Contradictory Couple. The Couple who dote on their children. The Cool Couple. The Egotistical Couple. The Couple who Coddle themselves. The Old Couple. The Plausible Couple. The Nice Little Couple.

It is noticeable that in the dozen sketches, the couples are all described as stupid, selfish or slothful. The only exception is the account about the old couple. The paragraph concluding the sketch runs : “The old couple sit side by side, and the old time seems like yesterday indeed. Looking back upon the path they have travelled, its dust and ashes disappear; the flowers that withered long ago, show brightly again upon its borders, and they grow young once more in the youth of those about them (their grandchildren)”.

In the "Sketches of Boz", we have a dozen sketches of young gentlemen. I shall cite the titles as in the above series and reserve the comments till the end : The Bashful Young Gentleman. The Out-and-Out Young Gentlemen. The Very Friendly Young Gentleman. The Military Young Gentleman. The Political Young Gentleman. The Domestic Young Gentleman. The Censorious Young Gentleman. The Funny Young Gentleman. The Theatrical Young Gentleman. The Poetical Young Gentleman. The "Throwing-Off" Young Gentleman. The Young Ladies' Young Gentleman.

Dickens at the time of writing these sketches was twenty four or twenty five years of age. It is surprising to see that he has not a single word of praise for anyone of this great variety of people. On the very friendly young gentleman he bestows ironical praise and about the military young gentleman he writes :

"We are at a loss to imagine how it has come to pass that military young gentlemen have obtained so much favour in the eyes of the young ladies of this kingdom".

He introduces professors and scientific people only to laugh at them. A literary lion does not fare much better at his hands. Whom then did he admire, who were the people to whom he gave his sympathy ? The question would not be difficult to answer. For his novels do not lack sympathetic characters. Our inquiry will be to ascertain if we could bring them together under some recognizable label.

The 24 sketches to which we have drawn attention are studies which owe considerably to the Overburian tradition of the 17th century. The sardonic uncle also belongs to it. Modern psychology would have probed into his case and discovered the causes rooted in his experience, which explained his behaviour. But Dickens did not apparently care to brood over the problem. His object was clearly to write something amusing and for this purpose a completely surface view sufficed.

The evidence we have considered above shows that his sympathies were extremely limited. No class of people seemed to elicit from him a word of appreciation. The only people who moved him were those who suffered hardship and privation in spite of honesty and diligent work. This is, however, a narrow world to write about and few could have made much out of it in absence of talents and abilities such as Dickens possessed. For him the suffering often appeared as a conflict between good and evil and one could view his Quilps and Uriah Heeps as myths representing a certain human situation, which led to suffering of an undeserved nature. The embodiment of suffering in terms of myths, which introduce us to human wisdom of permanent value is no mean achievement. As long as

men suffer and are unhappy Dickens will have a lasting appeal for readers. But it will be a mistake to take this aspect of his work as possessing the greatest significance. There is another and far more entertaining one in which we see original and eccentric people of a benevolent disposition, facing all sorts of difficulties, and often provoking a laughter of amusement. He seems also to write about children with genuine sympathy. But here Dickens is liable to be sentimental. For he seems to be carried away by his feeling, and produces an exaggerated picture, which appears hardly credible.

# DICKENS AND HIS MODERN READERS

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POPPY AIYYAR

EVERY age sees what it wants to see in a great writer. As T. S. Eliot points out in *Selected Essays*, even in the case of Shakespeare, the twentieth century has unearthed a fatigued Shakespeare, a messianic Shakespeare and a socialist Shakespeare. Dickens has also had his share of the vagaries of changing tastes and predilections. Victorian opinion of the writer veered between love for Dickens as a respectable comforter of the middle classes and admiration for the belligerent social critic who flayed the evils of an industrial society. George Gissing in fact was reluctant to admit that Dickens' later novels had any bitterness in them. He considered even the fog in *Bleak House* to be "rather cheerful than otherwise. George Bernard Shaw on the other hand, considered Dickens as one of the world's greatest writers, because he was the castigator of an industrialised society with its bourgeois values. Today, after two world wars (and of course Mr. Eliot's *Wasteland*!), the image of a cheerful bustling entertainer who indulges in social criticism by fits and starts is no longer appealing. If Dickens has to be meaningful to us, it is because of his deep world. Vision, the vision of a writer who is not sure of the meaning of this irrational life, a writer who is sometimes uncomfortably aware that human beings are at best merely bungling through a muddle.

Dickens' world, especially the world of his later novels, has something dark and sinister about it, a world which is perilously near that of Kafka or Swift. Even, his early novels have sombre anticipations of the dark novels of the 1850s. But in the novels between 1850 and 1870, the tone changes to something of gloom and even despair. Mr. Bumble in *Oliver Twist* could dismiss the law as an ass or an idiot, but in *Bleak House*, the law's delay drives innocent people to madness or death. In the earlier novels, there is at least a sharp demarcation between good and evil. Mr. Murdstone, for example, is comprehensible in his evil. But in later novels like *Edwin Drood*, there is no active condemnation of an individual like the Deputy. It is a naturalistic presentation of a world which is dark. There is a bitter acknowledgment of the inexplicable character of life. What we get is incidents, characters. But there is no sense of causation. It is this increasing preoccupation with the meaning of life that brings

Dickens very near our own times. In other words it gives universality to his themes as in the case of a Dante or a Shakespeare or a Dostoevsky. The dust-heap in *Our Mutual Friend*, the marsh in *Great Expectations* and the fog in *Bleak House* are symbols of the human condition. The court of Chancery in *Bleak House* and the Circumlocution Office in *Little Dorrit* have the same nightmarish quality of reality as Kafka's vision of an intricate bureaucracy under the Austro-Hungarian empire.

But while recognising this "modern" tone of Dickens, we should not get carried away into forgetting that. Dickens was in the main stream of the Victorian novel. He is not another Virginia Woolf or a Camus. There is no systematic attempt on the part of Dickens to present the world as it appears to the consciousness of a single focal awareness like that of Mrs. Dalloway or Roquentin in Sartrian *Nausea*. Dickens' attempt is to delineate a world where characters fail to interact on one another. The whole situation is presented deliberately from a detached third-person stand-point, the third person being the novelist himself. Even in *Bleak House*, the novel does not really take place as a byproduct of Esther's consciousness although the narrative is interspersed with large chunks of apparent autobiography. Esther at points becomes Dickens himself. For example it is Dickens and not she who describes Mr. Vholes' "dead glove" and his long thin shadow "chilling the seed in the ground as it glided along".

Dickens gives us a world, a plethora of experiences, not a single individual's consciousness. He is not trying to portray a single individual on the verge of nausea at the sight of a pebble on the beach, a single individual not being able to feel anything at his mother's funeral. On the other hand, what Dickens does show is a fundamental breakdown in terms of human communication. He presents a world where the individual moves in his own semi-autonomous world with his own appropriate catchword. Bagstock in *Dombey and Son* is a paradigm of the military colonel and all his gestures and actions tend to proclaim this fact, Mr. Micawber always waiting for something to turn up, Mr. Toots who is always amiable and vacuous, Mr. Boythorn with his perennial emphasis on "abandoned ruffians", Gradgrind and his adherence to "facts, facts, facts," are all people who move in a world all their own with no attempt to communicate. In fact, the terrifying part is that the need to communicate does not present itself as a serious problem to these characters. In Camus for example, the Outsider can sense his inability to make the Judge or the mourners understand him. But in the world of Dickens, there is not even an awareness of incommunicability. While the anti-hero of the modern novel creates the world from an awareness of his own conscious-

ness, and this schizophrenic world see-saws with the world as it appears to others, in Dickens the illusions last forever. For example if Mrs Jellyby has been disappointed in Borrioboola-Gha, she merely switches over her energy and time to fight for the rights of women to sit in Parliament, a mission involving more Correspondence than the old one"! There is no conflict between the character's own subjective projections and an uncomfortably obtrusive reality. This is perhaps the reason why Dickens seems cosy and happy to many readers. Each character seems to be encapsulated in his own world and therefore *seems* to be quite content, rather like the characters in the Drama of the Absurd. But the total picture that emerges is terrifying, people talking at cross-purposes with no attempt at connection.

What we have said so far may be exemplified by an analysis of *Bleak House*. "Fog every where; fog up the river, where it flows among green aits and meadows ... the Lord Chancellor with a foggy glory round his head", is how the novel begins. Around the Court of Chancery is ranged a number of characters, all of whom wait in hope for a favourable verdict. These characters live in their own weird world. Miss Flite lives in her own world of frustrations, her universe being encompassed by Jarndyce and Jarndyce. To Mrs. Jellyby, the natives of Borrioboola-Gha constitute the only interest in life. She is always "as usual, very busy, but that you will excuse. The African project at present employs my whole time." The other professional Philanthropist, Mrs. Pardiggle, is a "formidable lady with spectacles, a prominent nose and a loud voice, forever trying to convert people, including her own unhappy children, to the cause of the Tockahoopo Indians. She lives forever in the world of Committees and charity-trusts. Mr. Bayhem Badger takes eternal pride in the eminent status of his wife's ex-husbands. Mr. Tulkinghorn, the lawyer, "a great reservoir of confidences", speechlessly at home in the houses of the great ones of the earth "remains an oyster of the old School, whom nobody can open." Lady Dedlock's apparently sparkling world is a deadened world, and she is always "bored to death." Sir Lircester, her husband "conceives it as utterly impossible that anything can be wanting in any direction, by anyone who has had the good fortune to be received under his roof; and in a state of sublime satisfaction, he moves among the company, a magnificent refrigerator." And "when he has nothing else to do he can always contemplate his own greatness. It is a considerable advantage to a man to have so inexhaustible a subject." Mr. Guppy, Mr. Skimpole, Mr. Turveydrop, that model of Deportment, are all two dimensional in their excessive preoccupation with their own thought-patterns. Esther, clinking her keys, tries to find a kind of harmony in this disjointed world. But even she has to

constantly remind herself that she is Dame Durden and generate a common sense attitude in order to find coherent steaks in this chaos. Mr. Jarndyce is not another Cheeryble brother. He is a disillusioned philanthropist and has recourse to constant allusions to "a bitter East Wind" which requires several hours in his "growlery" to pass off! This illogical Juxta-position of universes would have no real connections with one another except in the sense that the webs woven by fellow participants would constitute Symbols of varying importance in one's own fantasy. Events do impinge on these private worlds. But the tenor of the novel is solipsistic, since every character assumes that the others are adjuncts to his own dominant mode of consciousness. The fog epitomises the nebulousness of the world external to any given character's standpoint.

What I have been saying so far might tend to convey the misleading impression that Dickens was the gloomy precursor of certain trends in contemporary Literature. Obviously no assessment of Dickens can be complete without reference to his wit which affords an insight into the pathetic egregiousness of a pretentious "human predicament". In the ultimate analysis, the greatness of Dickens is not contingent upon any single interpretation. In this Centenary year, it is perhaps fitting to emphasise Dickens' depth and universality which are susceptible of a variegated number of critical constructions. The perspective which I have offered estimates the relevance of Dickens to his modern critics. Despite the fact that Dickens would have regarded his dissector's assiduous efforts with something very like a twinkle in his eye, the shifts in critical consciousness are indicative of the perennial qualities of Dickens' work.

# DICKENS : SOME RECENT APPROACHES

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KRISHNA GHOSH

## I

THE popularity of Dickens the storyteller has perhaps never yet been seriously questioned ; the critical evaluation of Dickens the literary artist or Dickens the social thinker is comparatively recent. This is not to imply that the art of Dickens had not engaged the minds of important critics and writers of his own time. But the picture that emerges from Victorian criticism is overwhelmingly that of the jolly Dickens of Trollope, Swinburne and Chesterton—a benign Santa Claus figure whose exuberant humour was set off by pathos and by suitably nerve-tingling displays of the grotesque—a compound of Pickwick, Micawber and Fagin and Little Nell and the Six Jolly Fellowship Porters. Literary judgment tended to confine itself to the vaguely laudatory tones that one reserves for a national institution—"The Art of Mr. Dickens, although elaborate and great seems only a happy modification of Nature".<sup>1</sup> At the other end of the scale ( though admittedly somewhat later in the century ) one has critics like Meredith and Henry James who found the humour gross, the pathos maudlin and the characterization and plot construction clumsy and infantile ; there is a condemnation implicit in James's remark that Dickens could be called "the greatest of superficial novelists." One occasionally comes across an attempt to strike a mean between these two extremes. Declaring *Hard Times* to be the best of the novels, Ruskin observed, "The essential value and truth of Dickens's writings have been unwise lost sight of by many thoughtful persons merely because he presents his truth with some colour of caricature".<sup>2</sup> Gissing focused on Dickens the realist and satirist, and sought to analyse the techniques by which the novelist achieved his purpose ("the judicious use of emphasis and reiteration"). One common factor, however, united all these approaches ( with the possible exception of Ruskin's ), and that is the emphasis laid on the earlier novels at the expense of the later, more sombre ones. Tom-all-alone's and its like consorted ill with the dominant image of Christmas cheer, and were either glossed over or ignored or dismissed as the creations of a flagging imagination.<sup>3</sup>

Viewed in this perspective twentieth-century Dickens criticism presents a very different picture. The modern contribution lies not only in a more

serious study of Dickens the social commentator but also in the perception of the complexity of Dickens's art as it matured and developed through the successive novels. It lies, too, in the radical discovery of a macabre, tormented, subversive Dickens—one whose outward gaiety masked an impatience with Victorian values and an awareness of moral issues, and who anticipated Dostoevsky and Kafka in his exploration of certain areas of experience through a series of recurring symbols. As it may be imagined, these new approaches entail a shift of emphasis away from the early novels to a close analysis of the psychology and symbolism of the later works.

• II

When Edmund Wilson declared in 1939 that "it is difficult for British pundits to see in him ( Dickens ) the great artist and social critic that he was", one long phase in Dickens scholarship was practically over. Wilson's *The Two Scrooges* along with George Orwell's *Charles Dickens* ( 1940 ) were the two essays that were primarily responsible for transforming the traditional picture of Dickens and setting in motion a revival of serious critical interest in his work. Some of their approaches had been anticipated earlier, most notably in Shaw's reference to the later novels as "masterpieces" in his Introduction to *Hard Times* ( 1912 ). But, as Wilson declared, "we may find in Dickens's work today a complexity and depth to which even Gissing and Shaw have hardly.. done justice—an intellectual and artistic interest which makes Dickens loom very large in the whole perspective of the literature of the West." Orwell would perhaps not go so far. Yet, despite some signs of special pleading, Wilson's essay is definitely the more dramatic of the two in the brilliant case he makes for Dickens as Dostoievsky's master rather than a classic of the nursery.

Wilson's point of departure lies in the somewhat startling observation : "Of all the great Victorian writers he ( Dickens ) was probably the most antagonistic to the Victorian age itself." This Dickens is at bottom an uncomfortable and subversive rebel whose unfortunate childhood experiences, unhappy marriage, and sense of social and personal insecurity ( as exemplified in the Ellen Ternan episode ) had bred a subconscious hostility to the age which lionised him. One notes this in his social and political criticism, specially in his indictment against "the self-important and moralizing middle class". Wilson, however, does not make as much of this as does Orwell. As he pertinently observes, Dickens was fascinated more by oddities of character and situation than by abstract theory : his strength lies not in his ideas ( which were very often muddled ) but in his highly individualized portraits of the Gradgrinds and Foodles and M'Choakumchilde who formed the reality behind the system.

The real interest of *The Two Scrooges* lies in the application of psychological analysis to the study of Dickens's "rapid development as an artist". Wilson sees him as "the victim of a maniac—depressive cycle", expressing himself through fantasies of crime, madness and violence; the reader is made aware, especially in the later novels, of a savage bitterness that absolves them of the familiar charge of lurid exaggeration. Great importance is attached to the thematic significance of Dickens' symbols—in his use of the fog in *Bleak House*, the railway locomotive in *Dombey*, the uncovered coal pit of *Hard Times*, the dust pile and the rotting river of *Our Mutual Friend*, he is felt to anticipate Kafka, Mann and Joyce. The commonplace concerning the "flatness" of Dickens's characters comes equally under attack. Wilson admits that "Dickens's difficulty.. is to get good and bad together in one character" Nevertheless Eugene Wrayburn Bradley Headstone and John Jasper reveal a decided complexity of motive that indicates "the deep entanglement and conflict of the bad and good in one man". Finally, Wilson comments on Dickens's experiments with form. It was the novelist's achievement "to create a new tradition," to invent "a new literary genre"—what Wilson calls "the novel of the social group".

One may not accept all of Wilson's conclusions, yet his revaluation of Dickens undoubtedly called in question the validity of the existing critical platitudes. Orwell, too, sees Dickens as "a subversive writer, a radical...a rebel", who "attacked English institutions with a ferocity that has never since been approached". However, Dickens's social thinking is felt to be lacking in substance, since it was "almost exclusively moral". Orwell traces this to the petit-bourgeois prejudices of Dickens's middle class upbringing—he was aware of the contemporary social *malaise* but not of the need for a fundamental social change. Indeed, he had no conception at all of an alternative system nor had he any real sense of emotional involvement with the working classes. "His...sympathies are bounded by Mr. Pickwick on the upper side and Mr. Barkis on the lower". Ultimately it is not this unconvincing "bourgeois morality", but an almost Gothic fertility of invention that makes up for the limitations in Dickens' technique and vision—his books are full of "rotten architecture but wonderful gargoyles". Orwell is, in a sense, closer to Chesterton than to Wilson in his emphasis on Dickens' humour and sentiment, in his preference for *Pickwick* and in his dismissal of Meagles, Jarndyce and Betsy Trotwood in the same breath. But one gets in Orwell one aspect of Dickens that one misses in Wilson's scholarly and perspective study—the sense of an exhilarating, inexhaustible vitality of comic creation that will always remain a part of Dickens' appeal.

## III

Orwell's, and especially Wilson's, essays may be regarded as seminal not merely in their indication of new lines of approach, but also in their changing of the traditional picture of the middlebrow novelist within his "circle of stage fire" spinning out interminable tales to the formula of "make 'em laugh, make 'em weep, make 'em wait", Dickens, in fact, is shown to be relevant to the post-Marx post-Freud mentality as well as to the analytic tendencies of present-day criticism.

What, then, are the main kinds of current criticism? One might perhaps begin with the "biographical" studies (using the word in its widest sense). Happily, this no longer takes the form of crude assertions that Dickens "is" the son of Micawber-Dorrit and Mrs. Nickleby, who lodged with Mrs. Pipchin and fell in love with Dora who turned into Flora. Modern critics are certainly aware of the connection between the vast world of the novels and the novelist's life. But their emphasis lies, on the one hand, on Dickens' relationship to a particular social and historical milieu and, on the other, on his use of recurring personal motifs (the seriocomic father figure, the exploited child, the prison and so on) in the exploration of moral issues.

Bernard Shaw once declared that *Little Dorrit* had made a socialist out of him and most of the recent sociological criticism of Dickens is foreshadowed in his observation that the later novels embody "a passionate revolt against the whole industrial order of the modern world." That Dickens was sensitive to the pressures generated by the Industrial Revolution and the Poor Laws is evident in his crusade against Bumbledom in all its forms—the workhouse and Court of Chancery, the laissez-faire economics of *Hard Times*, the sham philanthropy of the Pardiggles and Jellybys, the genteel exploitation of the Merdles and Veneerings. And there is an attempt to build up an evaluated social world through the contrasting of social types within a single novel—Jo, Rouncewell and the moneyed Dedlocks in *Bleak House*, for instance. The authoritative analysis of the social basis of the novels is still perhaps Humphry House's *The Dickens World* (1941). House is concerned to show their value as "historical documents", even though he cannot quite absolve the novelist of a certain amount of Podsnappery in his minimizing of the brutality and squalor of London slum life. Dickens' attitudes are related to Victorian political economy, the Oxford movement and the prevailing legal and educational systems, and the basically realistic nature of his imagination is underlined. But the shortcoming of this variety of historical criticism is amply demonstrated in the conclusion that Dickens was "a journalist more than a creative artist." At the other extreme, one has T. A.

Jackson's Marxist interpretation in *Charles Dickens: The Progress of a Radical* (1937); the reader is left to accommodate this picture of a fierce protector of the proletariat with the genteel snobbery of David & Pip, or the distrust of the mob manifested in *Barnaby Rudge* and *A Tale of Two Cities*.

In the fifties, Jack Lindsay's *Charles Dickens* (1950) and Edgar Johnson's *Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph* (1952) achieved a more balanced appreciation from the sociological standpoint without distorting the crowded life of the novels. Both these biographical studies concentrate on Dickens' inner development. Johnson sees Dickens' genial humanity gaining in depth and validity through a considered criticism of the basic assumptions of industrialism—the "Cash Nexus" and the concept of the economic man. Lindsay traces the growth of anti-establishment opinion, remarking—"Even Balzac, Dostoevsky and Tolstoy cannot show such an orderly progression of penetrating definitions illuminating the fate of man under capitalism". Dickens' "socialism" is however evaluated in terms of art. Through a blend of fantasy sentiment and realism, he is felt to have succeeded in evoking a profound sense of the dissociation and alienation of an industrialized society. Finally, one has Arnold Kettle's attempt to resolve the troublesome opposition between Dickens' radicalism and conservatism through an investigation of the contrapuntal, and often contradictory, working of "plot" and "pattern" in the novels.<sup>4</sup>

Biographical criticism shades off, in another direction, into studies of psychology and symbolism—the critical emphasis being, of course, on the "dark" Dickens of the later novels. One ought incidentally to bear in mind that the sociological and symbolical approaches are not, properly speaking, mutually exclusive; both Lindsay and Johnson have spoken of the emblematic use of character and setting. Nevertheless, discussions purely on the level of psychology and imagery have not only revealed the brooding, ironic depths in Dickens. They have shown him to be strikingly "modern" in his likeness to certain major modern writers, as also in his exploration of what Saul Bellow called "the craters of the spirit". Thus J. Hillis Miller considers the search for identity (a contemporary theme) to be the central problem of *Martin Chuzzlewit*.<sup>5</sup> And A. E. Dyson, in his introductory essay to *Modern Judgement on Dickens* (1968) regards Dickens' use of "an undercurrent of symbolism adding resonance to the plot" to be "the most important single innovation in the novel's modern history" and a decisive influence on writers from Kafka to Scott Fitzgerald.

Now, it is well known that *Amerika* is Kafka's "Dickens" novel, and Stavregin and Raskolnikov may be compared to Steerforth and Jonas

Chuzzlewit as studies in criminal psychology. In the nineteen forties, Rex Warner and Edward Sackville-West had compared Dickens to Dostoevsky and Kafka. More recently, Mark Spilka in *Dickens and Kafka* (1959) analyses the symbols and attitudes common to both writers, as in *Bleak House*, *Little Dorrit* and *The Trial*, or *David Copperfield* and *The Metamorphosis*. To take another aspect, Monroe Engel in *The Maturity of Dickens* (1967) traces the organising principle of the novels to an underlying unity of tone achieved through the use of dominant image clusters (what he calls "multiple construction") rather than through a unity of incident. Other notable studies of imagery include essays by Dorothy Van Ghent on *Martin Chuzzlewit* and *Great Expectations* and Robert Morse on *Our Mutual Friend*; there is also Lionel Trilling's notable introductory essay to *Little Dorrit* (1953) where Dickens is felt to anticipate the Freudian theory of neurosis in his handling of the "prison" symbol.

From studies of imagery it is but a short step to investigations conducted along the lines of "new criticism." As may be expected, this method has some inbuilt hazards when applied to the sprawling and amorphous structure of Dickens' novels. Hillis Miller, for instance, makes interesting comparisons between Dickens and Baudelaire and likens Dickens' episodic style to Dos Passos and Faulkner. But his close verbal analysis is at times too subtle to capture the full flavour of Dickens' novels.

#### IV

F. R. Leavis, as is well known, placed Dickens very firmly outside of his "Great Tradition" for being a mere "entertainer", and his attitude is shared to some extent by Mario Praz. In the light of recent Dickens scholarship, however, this would definitely appear to be the opinion of a minority. The general consensus is on the side of Dickens the mature artist who can be read at many levels and who is Shakespearean in the range and humanity of his vision.

And yet, modern Dickens criticism poses certain inescapable problems—which Dickens is the critic talking about? Orwell had remarked that Dickens was "well worth stealing" but are not the Marxit Dickens, the journalistic Dickens, the Freudian Dickens and the Baudelairean Dickens contradictory, if not mutually exclusive? More important, granted that all these approaches enrich our response through the fresh insights that they offer, can any one of them be said to have captioned the totality of Dickens? Or should we say of Dickens criticism of the last thirty years what Douglas Bush said of Keats criticism—that it is difficult to say something that is "both new and true"?

Now it is undoubtedly a measure of an author's greatness that he should remain relevant to all ages. The tendency today is, however, to interpret Dickens almost exclusively from the standpoint of the modern sensibility—to make his novels reflect the pressures, perplexities and preoccupations of the twentieth century at the expense of their undeniable Victorian qualities. This is so even in the case of some historical critics whose particular task it is to restore the original vision of the artist by recreating his social background. "New criticism", with its emphasis on the work of art as an autonomous structure, naturally avoids this pitfall. But Dickens' work is very closely bound up with his life, and it would be an unnecessarily partial reading of, say, *David Copperfield* if one were to leave the character of John Dickens and the Blacking Factory trauma out of consideration.

Symbolic criticism appears at present to be the leading line of approach. Whether or not Dickens like Joyce or Baudelaire, was deliberate in his use of dominating symbols and image clusters is, of course, a matter of opinion. The symbolic critics have revealed the dense and intricate texture and the complex moral vision of the later novels; they have also argued convincingly for the application of criteria of unity to Dickens' novels different from those of, say, James. Their interpretations centre around the value terms of modern criticism—tension, complexity, irony, inclusiveness and so on. Unfortunately these terms are of little relevance to the earlier novels which, contrary to Victorian practice, are now consistently ignored as a group. (In fact, the only recent book on the early work that comes to mind is Steven Marcus' excellent study, *Dickens from Pickwick to Dombey* (1965). As Monroe Engel remarks—"It would be a greater challenge to current literary fashion to prescribe for the earlier fiction the kind of reading it deserves". Moreover, to value Dickens partly at least because he is "like" Kafka or Joyce or Proust (Graham Greene's view) or even Pinter (Dyson's view) is surely to do less than justice to the uniqueness of his vision. Finally, with its emphasis on the sardonic humour, the gloom and guilt of Dickens, symbolic criticism has little to say of Dickens' enduring comic sense of life.

Ultimately, what one misses in all these approaches is the sense of the Dickensian gusto. And the average reader still balks at any reading of Dickens that relegates Micawber to a footnote—or Samweller, or Mrs. Gamp, for that matter. Nevertheless, it may certainly be said of modern criticism that it shows a far deeper appreciation of Dickens' "infinite variety" than ever before.

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1. Edgar Allan Poe's review of *The Old Curiosity Shop* in "Graham's Magazine" (May 1841); reprinted in *The Dickens Critics*, ed. Ford & Lane (Cornell University Press, 1961).
2. Ruskin, *Unto This Last*.
3. Cf. Henry James's review of *Our Mutual Friend* (*Views & Reviews*, Boston, 1908). *Bleak House* was forced; *Little Dorrit* was laboured; The present work is dug out as with a spade and pickaxe (Reprinted in *The Dickens Critics*, ed. Ford & Lane).
4. Cf. The analysis of *Oliver Twist* in *An Introduction to The English Novel*, vol. I, pp 133—151.
5. J. Hillis Miller, *Charles Dickens, The World of his Novels* (Harvard University Press, 1959).

# DICKENS'S TREATMENT OF CHILD- PSYCHOLOGY—AND DAVID COPPERFIELD

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NARAYAN SAHA

WE talk so often of Dickens's humour, Dickens's characterisation, Dickens's flair for caricature and exaggeration, even Dickens's portrayal of contemporary events and manners that we tend to forget Dickens was no less an artist in his delineation of the child-mind, in his insight into the visions and fears, loves and hates, anger and pride, simplicity and innocence of a little child. At a time when he was producing in hectic haste voluminous novels on demand from the press and the public, when he was rising in fame and gaining in wealth on account of his lectures and 'sketches', he had but little scope for that concentration which is essential for the psychological treatment of any soul. Dickens obviously knew this. That is why, he laid the greatest stress on conversation between characters which automatically revealed their inner essence. Sir Walter Scott, that prince of historical novelists, also solved a similar problem in a similar way. In an ironically imaginary dialogue between a painter and the author himself at the beginning of the "Bride of Lammermoor" where the painter complains. "your characters patter too much ; there is nothing in whole pages but mere chat and dialogue", the author replies : "The ancient philosopher was wont to say 'speak that I may know thee'."

So in the matter of the treatment of child-psychology, Dickens's process is never those of the modern stream-of-consciousness novelists like Virginia Woolf and James Joyce ; he never took Freud and Dujardin as his models, nor Jung and James as his guides. Indeed, when Dickens wrote, these avowed masters of psychology had not yet seen the light of day. Dickens's process, from the very outset, is far more difficult than theirs, for with him the story must come first, psychology afterwards. And yet, they are to be intermingled. Here is the crux. Narration of events after events in a well-designed plot is easy. But the very moment a novelist steps aside and attempts to pry into the mind of his character, he runs the risk of losing our interest in, and sympathy for his work.

But infinitely difficult is the job of depicting the child's mind by a man who has left his days of childhood, that stage of blessed innocence, far behind, for in this case, the man must think and feel and dream like a

child ; otherwise, whatever he will say will sound as strange and artificial as the sound of a modern vehicle would do in an Anglo-Saxon locality. Perhaps that is why, in the whole range of English Literature, we rarely find a flawless treatment of child-psychology. Innocence and simplicity of childhood on the one hand, wisdom and profundity of old age on the other, seldom co-exist. Shakespeare was a great psychologist in the non-technical sense of the term ; he knew the minds of a monarch and a menial, of a soldier and a shipman, of a clown and a coquette, of a serious jew or a shrewd jester ; but he was not much of a specialist in child-psychology. Wordsworth tried to speak of childhood, like a child in his "Ode to Immortality" but he failed, for he could not forget his own 'shadow' and projected his own mind to that of his subject. Only Blake came anywhere near success in looking into the child's heart, and in his "Songs of Innocence" when he deals with shepherds and lambs and a little boy lost, wisdom speaks with the voice of a child. But after all, he was a poet and hence had little scope for an elaborate treatment of child-psychology. Only Richardson and Sterne in their novels of the 18th century, tried to look, before Dickens, at the 'theatre of the soul' of their characters; but even they cannot match Dickens, for their stories mark the psychology of adulthood. Dickens succeeded in his sphere of child-psychology because perhaps in creating the 'children' of his fancy, he lived over again his own days of childhood. David and Oliver and Smike (in *Nicholas Nickleby*)—all are prototypes of little Dickens.

David Copperfield's character as a child is most poignantly true because he is the most affectionate child of his creator. "It will be easily believed", Dickens declares, "that I am a fond parent to every child of my fancy and that no one can ever love that family as dearly as I love them. But like many fond parents, I have in my heart of hearts, a favourite child—and his name is David Copperfield."

David's recital of all that he had to pass through, the uglier aspects of his early stage of life, read like an authentic story. They seem so real, so pity-provoking, because his sufferings are so undeserved. To a child, when his father is dead and gone, his mother is the nearest being whom he can trust and love. Then his mother is *his*, he will brook no rival, not to speak of a second 'father'. And yet, one Mr. Murdstone steps on the scene, a self-styled father who calls Mrs. Copperfield by her pet name, touches her in David's presence. David's heart aches, what he can't stop, he must endure ; and he endures even though it requires patience and stoicism of a mature man.

A child understands little ; but he has an instinctive sense to know love from hate. With his mother, helplessly moving away from him,

David looked in hectic haste for one who would love and remember and understand him. Emily was such a one and therefore David had a sharp sense of pain at his separation from her.

Home was for him a nest of peace and his mother, the sole comforter. How he suffered in silent grief when he found that his mother, the most dear and affectionate being, was governed by one whom he hated most ! He had none to whom he could open his mind, but walls, windows and his bed. So when his mother came once upstairs in search of him, her single touch drew down from the child's eyes a flood of tears,—tears not of wrath, not even of remorse, but of mute complaints and wounded pride.

If the child knows the agent of love, he knows also the agent of fear. Mr. Murdstone, the hard hearted, intrusive "father" of little David was so cruel, and so exacting in his demands and positive in his orders that the child felt it was better to be obedient than be adamant. That is why, at his command, he cleaned his face from the wash-basin as willingly as a hateful dog.

Dog ? Yes, that is what he felt himself once at a later date. Murdstone discovered a tendency in little Davy for sullenness and abstinance from a particular room and he thundered : "I will have a respectful, prompt and ready bearing towards myself, towards Jane Murdstone and towards your mother. I will not have this room shunned as if it were infected, at the pleasure of a child. Sit down." And what was David's reaction ?—"He ordered me like a dog and I obeyed like a dog." It reads like the record of an incident burnt into the lad's consciousness. It is not a vision or a waking dream. Fled are those days but their memory remained.

These records of the personal experiences, the painful reminiscence of the past life achieves an added poignancy from the fact that Dickens, the 'artist', through the lips of David, remembered and re-lived the past. His own griefs and disasters of boyhood, his own sufferings and setbacks, sorrows and pains, hopes shattered and loves ruined—he made David speak out ; that is why, the expressions are so appealing. Dickens told the boy's story as a boy would tell it. "A boy would remember every brutal syllable in every brutal sentence ; he would remember it to his dying day. In nothing is, Dickens more palpably true than in the exactness with which he reproduces the intense sensitivity of childhood".

## OF GASTRONOMICAL HUMOUR IN DICKENS AND IN OTHERS

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K. LAHIRI

ONE of the chief and fondly cherished subjects from which Dickens's humour germinates is food. Many of his most unforgettable humourous incidents and dialogues occur at meal times. He not only relishes, as every healthy animal does, the anticipation of a good dinner, but enjoys imaginatively full gastronomical pleasure through visualizing an effusion of details of an elaborate menu. To Dickens the very description of food is funny, as of course it is.

Usually Dickens secures humourous effect by his leisurely cataloguing of an enormous quantity and a large variety of eatables. And this enumeration is supported by a patient writing up of the meticulous ritual of the preparation of food. And lastly to crown it all comes the culmination of the whole operation in the serving of the successive items of food with the pleasing show and sound of the crockery and the twinkle and glare in the looks of the waiters in anticipation of appreciation, followed finally by the consuming, the picture of actual eating, including the most careful handling, ceremonious carving, punctuated by the mouth-watering and munching and sucking and licking with the gusts of a Sir Epicure.

Here is an affectionate account of the cooking and eating of a goose in *The Christmas Carol*. The perfectly coordinated participation of several people in the preparation presumes a seriousness that is simply amusing :

"Such a bustle ensued that you might have thought a goose the rarest of all birds. Mrs. Cratchit made the gravy ( ready beforehand in a little saucepan ) hissing hot ; Master Peter mashed the potatoes with incredible vigour ; Miss Belinda sweetened up the apple sauce ; Martha dusted the hot plates."

The description that follows, of serving the food, and particularly of the ceremonious slicing of the goose meat, has a mock heroic tone in reflecting the suspense and admiration of the assembled party :

"At last the dishes were set on, and grace was said. It was succeeded by a breathless pause, as Mrs. Cratchit, looking slowly all along the carving knife, prepared to plunge it in the breast ; but when she did, and when the long-expected gush of stuffing issued forth, one murmur of delight arose all round the board."

And then the preparation of the pudding, steaming and smelling, and its presentation with full formality, have a grandeur of its own, soaked in suppressed humour :

"Hullo ! A great deal of steam ! The pudding was out of the copper. A smell like a washing day ! That was the cloth. A smell like an eating-house and a pastry cook's next door to each other, with a laundress's next door to that ! That was the pudding ! In half a minute Mrs. Cratchit entered—flushed, but smiling proudly—with the pudding, like a speckled cannon-ball, so hard and firm, blazing in half of half-a-quarter of ignited brandy, and be dight with Christmas holly stuck into the top."

The course of meat and pudding is crowned by a rich mixture of tasty ingredients and a heap of fruits to boot :

"And then there was the compound in the jug, tasted and considered perfect, apples and oranges on the table, and a shovel full of chestnuts on the fire."

With such a load on board, Bob Cratchit can exclaim from a full heart, "A Merry Christmas to us all, my dears. God bless us all !"

There is a parallel picture of a hearty meal in *Bleak House*. Dickens employs there, as in *The Christmas Carol*, the same technique of elaboration and profusion of details. The description, however, is pitched here in a different key. Whereas in *The Christmas Carol* he relishes leisurely amplification, in *Bleak House* he seems to enjoy speed and agility all around. Mr. Guppy gives the dinner to the hungry Jobling and young Smallweed, a limb of the law, at the Slap-Bang dining house.

The whole process of ordering and serving the meal is a scene full of enthusiasm. They order veal and ham and French beans—quite conscious of the minutest details :

"and don't you forget the stuffing, Polly"—  
with three pint pots of half-and-half.

Then follows a picture of lively activity from kitchen to table, of cooks and servers and eaters :

"Quickly the waitress returns, bearing what is apparently a model of the Tower of Babel, but what is really a pile of plates and flat tin dish-covers. ... Then, amid a constant coming in, and going out, and running about, and a clatter of crockery, and a rumbling up and down of the machine which brings the nice cuts from the kitchen, and a shrill crying for a more nice cuts down the speaking pipe, and a shrill reckoning of the cost of nice cuts that have been disposed of, and a general flush and steam of hot joints, cut and uncut, and a considerable heated atmosphere in which the soiled knives and table cloths seem to break out spontaneously

into eruptions of grease and blotches of beer, the legal triumvirates appease their appetites."

The repetition and variation of the courses are done with appreciable relish :

"Mr. Jobling has a second go of veal and ham with a summer cabbage, and plies his knife and fork with a relishing steadiness. For pastry, they decide on marrow puddings, and to these succeed 'Three Cheshire' and to these 'three small rums'."

The eater's gusto trips the formality of invoking divine grace and bubbles with vulgar platitudes :

"Mr. Jobling does not invoke God's blessing on the company, but he philosophises : 'What am I to do ? How am I to live ? *Il fo manger*, you know', says he, pronouncing that word as if he meant a necessary fixture in an English stable. '*Il fo manger*. That's the French saying, and managering is as necessary to me as it is to a Frenchman. Or more so'."

Even a comparatively routine meal with its simplicity and ordinariness possesses a halo of grandeur and enthusiasm about it. The meal served to Mr. Clenman in *Little Dorrit* is not associated with any special occasion or ceremony. It is just a daily programme. This is no high dinner with a long-drawn menu, richly prepared and gaudily served. Still the whole affair seems to have a dignity worthy of the Patriarchal household. The simple food is well-cooked to promote quiet digestion and the service is neatly done.

It begins with some soup, some fried soles, a butter boat of shrimp sauce, and a dish of potatoes. Then it continues with mutton, a steak and an apple-pie. What is lacking in variety appears to be compensated by quantity and sincerity. The last of the Patriarchs has always been a mighty eater. With perfect ease and naivety he disposes of an enormous quantity of solid food with "the benignity of a good soul, who is feeding someone else." Mr. Clenman enjoys all through. He is visibly delighted.

Elaboration, which is the forte of Dickens's style, adds zest to his gastronomical humour. 'The outstanding, unmistakable mark of Dickens's writing,' observes George Orwell, 'is the unnecessary detail.' And this is never shown to better advantage than in the description of food.

In *Old Curiosity Shop* little Jacob eats oysters with elaborate ceremonies most punctiliously observed, as if it had been born and bred in the business and had been practising the rituals for many years in high social parties. With how much care and discretion, beyond his years, does he sprinkle the pepper and the vinegar ! But the most dignified and artistic part of the programme is executed when the eating is over. With what skill of hands and playful fancy does he build up with the leavings, the

shells, a magnificent grotto on the table! Any one can eat oysters, and with pepper and vinegar too. But only a Dickens child, with a Dickensian humour tending towards elaboration of a simple action, could build up a grotto with the shells.

Dickens's humour apropos of food is sought to be produced by his double approaches simultaneously from two directions. The first contributory factor is an elaboration in the description of food, and of its cooking and serving. This is remarkable not simply for variety of the menu but also for the sheer quantity of the supply of food. On the other side, humour results from the very relish and enthusiasm of the eater, the zest with which the food is consumed and enjoyed.

About Dickens's presentation of menus of food there is always something large, a sense of amplitude and abundance. Inspite of their essential homeliness there is a touch of the rare and delicious, though the food is perfectly ordinary and commonplace in character. The Dickensian dinner table is simply irresistible. The author devotes so much labour and care to the delineation of food at every available opportunity—and opportunities do crop up here and there quite unexpectedly—that the most casual reader of Dickens's novels can sumptuously eat his way through the volumes, though in these hard days of scarcity and dearness such rich varieties and huge quantities of eatables would hardly be within the means of the average middle class household even in Dickens's homeland, not to speak of ours.

In the long history of human dietetics there have been ups and downs in the recognition and social position of certain items of food. In India half a century before tomatoes were looked down upon as an inferior kind of vegetable with no food value. They received no special attention of richer sections of society. Consumed primarily by poorer people, these used to be sold quite cheap and neglected as an ingredient in preparation of food. Later the value of its vitamin-contents being recognised, this once-slighted vegetable rose quickly to a high status in Indian dietetics. It is now considered a delicacy and a must in the culinary world, both as an essential part of cooked dishes and as an independent sauce or salad to be consumed raw.

In the same manner in the west there came a wide variation in the valuation of oysters in the social scale. A century ago, in Dickens's days, these formed the staple non-vegetarian food for the poorer folk in rural areas, where these were available in plenty. Later by the strange vagaries of aristocratic taste, sometimes reverting to the ways of the vulgar, which seem to acquire a fascination for the refined, this poor man's food came to be regarded as a delicacy at the table of the rich.

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# DICKENS'S TREATMENT OF CHILD- PSYCHOLOGY—AND DAVID COPPERFIELD

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NARAYAN SAHA

WE talk so often of Dickens's humour, Dickens's characterisation, Dickens's flair for caricature and exaggeration, even Dickens's portrayal of contemporary events and manners that we tend to forget Dickens was no less an artist in his delineation of the child-mind, in his insight into the visions and fears, loves and hates, anger and pride, simplicity and innocence of a little child. At a time when he was producing in hectic haste voluminous novels on demand from the press and the public, when he was rising in fame and gaining in wealth on account of his lectures and 'sketches', he had but little scope for that concentration which is essential for the psychological treatment of any soul. Dickens obviously knew this. That is why, he laid the greatest stress on conversation between characters which automatically revealed their inner essence. Sir Walter Scott, that prince of historical novelists, also solved a similar problem in a similar way. In an ironically imaginary dialogue between a painter and the author himself at the beginning of the "Bride of Lammermoor" where the painter complains : "your characters patter too much ; there is nothing in whole pages but mere chat and dialogue", the author replies : "The ancient philosopher was wont to say 'speak that I may know thee'."

So in the matter of the treatment of child-psychology, Dickens's process is never those of the modern stream-of-consciousness novelists like Virginia Woolf and James Joyce ; he never took Freude and Dujordin as his models, nor Jung and James as his guides. Indeed, when Dickens wrote, these avowed masters of psychology had not yet seen the light of day. Dickens's process, from the very outset, is far more difficult than theirs, for with him the story must come first, psychology afterwards. And yet, they are to be intermingled. Here is the crux. Narration of events after events in a well-designed plot is easy. But the very moment a novelist steps aside and attempts to pry into the mind of his character, he runs the risk of losing our interest in, and sympathy for his work.

But infinitely difficult is the job of depicting the child's mind by a man who has left his days of childhood, that stage of blessed innocence, far behind, for in this case, the man must think and feel and dream like a

child ; otherwise, whatever he will say will sound as strange and artificial as the sound of a modern vehicle would do in an Anglo-Saxon locality. Perhaps that is why, in the whole range of English Literature, we rarely find a flawless treatment of child-psychology. Innocence and simplicity of childhood on the one hand, wisdom and profundity of old age on the other, seldom co-exist. Shakespeare was a great psychologist in the non-technical sense of the term ; he knew the minds of a monarch and a menial, of a soldier and a shipman, of a clown and a coquette, of a serious jew or a shrewd jester ; but he was not much of a specialist in child-psychology. Wordsworth tried to speak of childhood, like a child in his "Ode to Immortality" but he failed, for he could not forget his own 'shadow' and projected his own mind to that of his subject. Only Blake came anywhere near success in looking into the child's heart, and in his "Songs of Innocence" when he deals with shepherds and lambs and a little boy lost, wisdom speaks with the voice of a child. But after all, he was a poet and hence had little scope for an elaborate treatment of child-psychology. Only Richardson and Sterne in their novels of the 18th century, tried to look, before Dickens, at the 'theatre of the soul' of their characters, but even they cannot match Dickens, for their stories mark the psychology of adulthood. Dickens succeeded in his sphere of child-psychology because perhaps in creating the 'children' of his fancy, he lived over again his own days of childhood. David and Oliver and Smike (in *Nicholas Nickleby*)—all are prototypes of little Dickens.

David Copperfield's character as a child is most poignantly true because he is the most affectionate child of his creator. "It will be easily believed", Dickens declares, "that I am a fond parent to every child of my fancy and that no one can ever love that family as dearly as I love them. But like many fond parents, I have in my heart of hearts, a favourite child—and his name is David Copperfield."

David's recital of all that he had to pass through, the uglier aspects of his early stage of life, read like an authentic story. They seem so real, so pity-provoking, because his sufferings are so undeserved. To a child, when his father is dead and gone, his mother is the nearest being whom he can trust and love. Then his mother is *his*, he will brook no rival, not to speak of a second 'father'. And yet, one Mr. Murdstone steps on the scene, a self-styled father who calls Mrs. Copperfield by her pet name, touches her in David's presence. David's heart aches, what he can't stop, he must endure ; and he endures even though it requires patience and stoicism of a mature man.

A child understands little ; but he has an instinctive sense to know love from hate. With his mother, helplessly moving away from him,

David looked in hectic haste for one who would love and remember and understand him. Emily was such a one and therefore David had a sharp sense of pain at his separation from her.

Home was for him a nest of peace and his mother, the sole comforter. How he suffered in silent grief when he found that his mother, the most dear and affectionate being, was governed by one whom he hated most ! He had none to whom he could open his mind, but walls, windows and his bed. So when his mother came once upstairs in search of him, her single touch drew down from the child's eyes a flood of tears,—tears not of wrath, not even of remorse, but of mute complaints and wounded pride.

If the child knows the agent of love, he knows also the agent of fear. Mr. Murdstone, the hard hearted, intrusive "father" of little David was so cruel, and so exacting in his demands and positive in his orders that the child felt it was better to be obedient than be adamant. That is why, at his command, he cleaned his face from the wash-basin as willingly as a hateful dog.

Dog ? Yes, that is what he felt himself once at a later date. Murdstone discovered a tendency in little Davy for sullenness and abstinence from a particular room and he thundered : "I will have a respectful, prompt and ready bearing towards myself, towards Jane Murdstone and towards your mother. I will not have this room shunned as if it were infected, at the pleasure of a child. Sit down." And what was David's reaction ?—"He ordered me like a dog and I obeyed like a dog." It reads like the record of an incident burnt into the lad's consciousness. It is not a vision or a waking dream. Fled are those days but their memory remained.

These records of the personal experiences, the painful reminiscence of the past life achieves an added poignancy from the fact that Dickens, the 'artist', through the lips of David, remembered and re-lived the past. His own griefs and disasters of boyhood, his own sufferings and setbacks, sorrows and pains, hopes shattered and loves ruined—he made David speak out ; that is why, the expressions are so appealing. Dickens told the boy's story as a boy would tell it. "A boy would remember every brutal syllable in every brutal sentence ; he would remember it to his dying day. In nothing is, Dickens more palpably true than in the exactness with which he reproduces the intense sensitivity of childhood".

## OF GASTRONOMICAL HUMOUR IN DICKENS AND IN OTHERS

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K. LAHIRI

ONE of the chief and fondly cherished subjects from which Dickens's humour germinates is food. Many of his most unforgettable humorous incidents and dialogues occur at meal times. He not only relishes, as every healthy animal does, the anticipation of a good dinner, but enjoys imaginatively full gastronomical pleasure through visualizing an effusion of details of an elaborate menu. To Dickens the very description of food is funny, as of course it is.

Usually Dickens secures humourous effect by his leisurely cataloguing of an enormous quantity and a large variety of eatables. And this enumeration is supported by a patient writing up of the meticulous ritual of the preparation of food. And lastly to crown it all comes the culmination of the whole operation in the serving of the successive items of food with the pleasing show and sound of the crockery and the twinkle and glare in the looks of the waiters in anticipation of appreciation, followed finally by the consuming, the picture of actual eating, including the most careful handling, ceremonious carving, punctuated by the mouth-watering and munching and sucking and licking with the gusts of a Sir Epicure.

Here is an affectionate account of the cooking and eating of a goose in *The Christmas Carol*. The perfectly coordinated participation of several people in the preparation presumes a seriousness that is simply amusing :

"Such a bustle ensued that you might have thought a goose the rarest of all birds. Mrs. Cratchit made the gravy ( ready beforehand in a little saucepan ) hissing hot ; Master Peter mashed the potatoes with incredible vigour ; Miss Belinda sweetened up the apple sauce ; Martha dusted the hot plates."

The description that follows, of serving the food, and particularly of the ceremonious slicing of the goose meat, has a mock heroic tone in reflecting the suspense and admiration of the assembled party :

"At last the dishes were set on, and grace was said. It was succeeded by a breathless pause, as Mrs. Cratchit, looking slowly all along the carving knife, prepared to plunge it in the breast ; but when she did, and when the long-expected gush of stuffing issued forth, one murmur of delight arose all round the board."

into eruptions of grease and blotches of beer, the legal triumvirates appease their appetites."

The repetition and variation of the courses are done with appreciable relish :

"Mr. Jobling has a second go of veal and ham with a summer cabbage, and plies his knife and fork with a relishing steadiness. For pastry, they decide on marrow puddings, and to these succeed 'Three Cheshire's' and to these 'three small rums'."

The eater's gusto trips the formality of invoking divine grace and bubbles with vulgar platitudes :

"Mr. Jobling does not invoke God's blessing on the company, but he philosophises : 'What am I to do ? How am I to live ? *Il fo manger*, you know', says he, pronouncing that word as if he meant a necessary fixture in an English stable. '*Il fo manger*. That's the French saying, and managering is as necessary to me as it is to a Frenchman. Or more so'."

Even a comparatively routine meal with its simplicity and ordinariness possesses a halo of grandeur and enthusiasm about it. The meal served to Mr. Clenman in *Little Dorrit* is not associated with any special occasion or ceremony. It is just a daily programme. This is no high dinner with a long-drawn menu, richly prepared and gaudily served. Still the whole affair seems to have a dignity worthy of the Patriarchal household. The simple food is well-cooked to promote quiet digestion and the service is neatly done.

It begins with some soup, some fried soles, a butter boat of shrimp sauce, and a dish of potatoes. Then it continues with mutton, a steak and an apple-pie. What is lacking in variety appears to be compensated by quantity and sincerity. The last of the Patriarchs has always been a mighty eater. With perfect ease and naivety he disposes of an enormous quantity of solid food with "the benignity of a good soul, who is feeding someone else." Mr. Clenman enjoys all through. He is visibly delighted.

Elaboration, which is the forte of Dickens's style, adds zest to his gastronomical humour. 'The outstanding, unmistakable mark of Dickens's writing,' observes George Orwell, 'is the unnecessary detail.' And this is never shown to better advantage than in the description of food.

In *Old Curiosity Shop* little Jacob eats oysters with elaborate ceremonies most punctiliously observed, as if it had been born and bred in the business and had been practising the rituals for many years in high social parties. With how much care and discretion, beyond his years, does he sprinkle the pepper and the vinegar ! But the most dignified and artistic part of the programme is executed when the eating is over. With what skill of hands and playful fancy does he build up with the leavings, the

shells, a magnificent grotto on the table! Any one can eat oysters, and with pepper and vinegar too. But only a Dickens child, with a Dickensian humour tending towards elaboration of a 'simple action' could build up a grotto with the shells.

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In the long history of human dietetics there have been ups and downs in the recognition and social position of certain items of food. In India half a century before tomatoes were looked down upon as an inferior kind of vegetable with no food value. They received no special attention of richer sections of society. Consumed primarily by poorer people, these used to be sold quite cheap and neglected as an ingredient in preparation of food. Later the value of its vitamin-contents being recognised, this once-slighted vegetable rose quickly to a high status in Indian dietetics. It is now considered a delicacy and a must in the culinary world, both as an essential part of cooked dishes and as an independent sauce or salad to be consumed raw.

In the same manner in the west there came a wide variation in the valuation of oysters in the social scale. A century ago, in Dickens's days, these formed the staple non-vegetarian food for the poorer folk in rural areas, where these were available in plenty. Later by the strange vagaries of aristocratic taste, sometimes reverting to the ways of the vulgar, which seem to acquire a fascination for the refined, this poor man's food came to be regarded as a delicacy at the table of the rich.

"It is a very remarkable circumstance, Sir," says Sam Weller, "that poverty and oysters seem to go together." Thus a change in popular taste regarding food is exploited by Dickens as a source of joking humour.

To extract humour out of so common and universal a material as food Dickens hardly takes recourse to any unnatural situation or attitude. In his approach to food Dickens is altogether human and perfectly natural. He is never oversensuous in his descriptions; he scarcely stresses imaginative relish of specially cherished luxuries in food. The interest in food that his characters evince is not characteristic of a gourmet or glutton; it is just the elemental human Zest in food. And the inclination towards exhibitionism of sheer quantity of edibles is no more than a healthy child's avidity for and pleasure in an excess of food. And is not the sight of a child, demanding a lion's share of a particular course at the table—soup, fish, meat, sweets, cheese—which has taken its fancy, highly amusing?

Dickens's zest in food infects readers, one and all, irrespective of age, society, food habits and prejudices. An Indian reader, though not accustomed to European dishes, even having a natural liking for vegetarian diets, may still vicariously relish Dickens's display of eatables, simple or rich, but always hot and tasty. Dickens is non-pareil as a describer of food among imaginative writers, ancient and modern, western and oriental. And the secret of his uncommonness is in his sharing fully the perfectly common universal zest in eating.

It must be interesting to compare Dickens's treatment of food with those of other English writers, his predecessors, contemporaries, and successor. In the early tradition of English prose fiction Richardson and Fielding, Smolett and Sterne, Goldsmith and Scott, being preoccupied with sentimentality or didacticism, psychology or romance, did not indulge in descriptions and relish of food. Jane Austen has slight references to eatables, in her domestic scenes, as for instance, when Mrs. Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice* plans for her choicest dishes for her would-be son-in-law, Bingley, who disappoints her by unexpectedly leaving for the town. Lamb in one or two of his fanciful essays gives magnificent food scenes with a profusion of humour. But it is in some of the imaginative writers of the twentieth century, like Wodehouse, 'Saki', and Evelyn Waugh, that we come across inviting comparisons and contrasts in this respect.

That Lamb took an essentially human relish in food is plainly borne out by his attempt to trace an almost religious ritual of Grace before Meat to the grossly animal joy of the primitive hunter starting a sumptuous meat-meal, which was not quite frequent :

"In the shouts and triumphal songs with which, after a season of sharp

abstinence, a lucky booty of deer's or goat's flesh would naturally be ushered home, existed, perhaps, the germ of the modern grace."

Effusive in his elaboration of a good repast, Lamb is at the same time deeply touched by his constitutional sympathy for the poor, who have to remain content with the simplest meal :

"The poor man's bread is his daily bread, literally his bread for the day. '*Their* courses are *perennial*?' '*Their*' stands for rich men, and '*perennial*' means a constant supply of dainties including fish, flesh and fowls."

He gives this contrast a humorous twist by his mock-serious association of simplicity with religiosity. A plain diet, like a dish of mutton with turnips, least stimulative to appetite, leaves the mind free to indulge in grace, while a rich cote of venison or turtle will cause a perturbation of mind ill conducive to such sentiments. Lamb confesses that when he has

"Sate at rich men's tables, with the savoury soup and messes steaming up the nostrils, and moistening the lips of the guests with desire and a distracted choice,"

he has felt any ceremonious grace rather unseasonable.

Lamb even cites Milton for a banquet of surfeit such as Satan provides for a temptation in *Paradise Regained* :

"A table richly spread in regal mode  
With dishes piled, and meats of noblest sort  
And savour ; beasts of chase, or fowl of game,  
In pastry built, or from the spit, or boiled,  
Gris-amber-steamed : all fish from sea or shore,  
Freshet or purling brook, for which was drained  
Pontus and Lucrine bay, and Afric coast."

'Gris-amber-steamed' means : Steamed with ambergris, on account of its agreeable perfume. And Lamb suspects that Milton was thinking not so much of old Roman luxury in food as of his own gaudy days at Cambridge.

Lamb's gastronomical humour reaches its height when he takes a man's taste in food as an index of his refinement. If a man, Quaker-like swallows unctuous morsels of deer's flesh, affecting not to know what he is eating, Lamb suspects his taste in higher matters. Lamb shrinks instinctively from one who professes to like minced veal. With as much conviction he believes that one refusing apple-dumplings can not have a pure mind, though he confesses that the vegetable tribe, generally speaking, have lost their gust with him. Hence the theory : there is a physiognomical character in the tastes for food. In matter of food Lamb

betrays a scrupulous taste and a sharp sensitiveness. If it is least spoilt in preparation, he is thrown out of temper :

"Butter ill melted—that commonest of kitchen failures—puts me beside my tenor."

Lamb is very particular about his preference of the Roast Pig of a tender age :

"Of all the delicacies in the whole *mundus edibilis*, I will maintain it to be the most delicate—*princeps obsoniarum*. I speak not of your grown porkers—things between pig and pork—those hobbledehoys—but a young and tender suckling under a moon old."

How eloquent is Lamb's choice of epithets in his endeavour to communicate the rare relish of the crackling—its indefinable smell and taste, the very feel of it !—

"There is no flavour comparable, I will contend, to that of the crisp, tawny, well-watched, not over-roasted, *crackling*, as it is well called—the very teeth are invited to their share of the pleasure at this banquet in overcoming the coy, brittle resistance—with the adhesive oleaginous—O call it not fat ! but an indefinable sweetness growing up to it—the tender blossoming of fat—fat cropped in the bud—taken in the shoot—in the first innocence—the cream and quintessence of the child-pig's yet pure blood—the lean, no lean, but a kind of animal manna—or, rather, fat and lean ( if it must be so ) so blended and running into each other, that both together make but one ambrosian result or common substance."

The deliberate use of heavy Latin expression raises the pettiness to a ritualistic dignity.

And then the unforgettable picture of the little innocent in the process of being roasted in mild heat and in its ultimate position of quiet rest on the table ! The primitive cruelty of the rite thaws in the genial warmth of Elia's sympathy, which does not, however, lapse into Dickens's sentimental pity. Lamb's delicate treatment saves the description from being painfully uncanny. The mock-moralistic tone rather helps the passage pass into the realm of pure humour :

"Behold him while he is 'doing'—it seemeth rather a refreshing warmth, than a scorching heat, that he is so passive to. How equably he twirleth round the string ! Now he is just done ! To see the extreme sensibility of that tender age ! he hath wept out his pretty eyes—radiant jellies—soothing stars. See him in the dish, his second cradle, how meek he lieth !"

Through a magnificent contrast with pine-apple, Lamb triumphantly establishes the all round superiority of roast pig both in excellent flavour and in providing ample nourishment by satisfying appetite :

"He is the best of savors (savours). Pine-apple is great, She is indeed almost too transcendent—a delight, if not sinful, yet so like to sinning, that really a tender-conscienced person would do well to pause—too ravishing for mortal taste, she woundeth and excoriateth the lips that approach her—like lovers' kisses, she biteth—she is a pleasure bordering on man from the fierceness and insanity of her relish—but she stoppeth at the palate—she meddleth not with the appetite—and the coarsest hunger might barter her consistently for a mutton-chop".

The passage, an eloquent testimony as it is to Lamb's super-refinement in taste, is richly punched with humour provoked by the simile of the lovers.

And he has an equal concern for nutrition. Roast pig strengthens the strong and nourishes the weak :

"Pig—let me speak his praise—is no less provocative of the appetite than he is satisfactory to the criticalness of the censorious palate. The strong man may batten on him, and the weakling refuseth not his mild juices. No part of him is better or worse than another."

Lamb's choice of sauce for the roast pig speaks of his delicate taste. A tender dish as the suckling roast is, it must not be spoilt by rich, hot spices :

"His sauce should be considered. Decidedly, a few bread crumbs, done up with his liver and brains, and a dash of mild sage. But banish, dear Mrs. Cook, I beseech you, the whole onion tribe. Barbecue your whole hogs to your palate, steep them in shalots, stuff them out with plantations of the rank and guilty garlic; you cannot poison them, or make them stronger than they are—but consider, he is a weakling—a flower."

The soft flavour of the roast cannot be improved by the coarse, pernicious, pungent smell of garlic.

Lamb is not a selfish grabber of food. What he likes he would share ungrudgingly with his friends and neighbours :

"Hares, pheasants, partridges, snipes, barn-door chickens, capons, plovers, brawn, barrels of oysters, I dispose as freely as I receive them."

But he stops as he comes to the pig, a blessing particularly adapted to his individual palate. He keeps its good flavour for himself.

Lamb has a taste for sweets too, particularly for good hot cakes. He recollects with pleasure such snacks as his aunt used to give him in parting after a holiday in his boyhood :

"My good old aunt, who never parted from me at the end of a holiday without stuffing a sweetmeat, or some nice thing, into my pocket; had

dismissed me one evening with a smoking plum-cake, fresh from the oven".

After having given it away in charity to a beggar on the way to school, the boy feels sad, and lapses into a fit of regret :

"The odour of that spicy cake came back upon my recollection, and the pleasure and the curiosity I had taken in seeing her make it, and her joy when she sent it to the oven."

P. G. Wodehouse's humour about food does not proceed either from the sheer quantity of its supply or from the hearty zest with which it is enjoyed. He is no less touched and tickled by the same subject. But his entertainment flows from quite different and unexpected aspects and attitudes. Sometimes the sense of frustration of the meals nobody ever eats is twisted into humour. Or, it is humour born naturally of the incongruity of the shocking meals. With such tendencies towards the abnormal, Wodehouse is not however, lacking in the straight-forward appreciation of carefully planned meals.

In *the Juice of an Orange* Wodehouse exploits the handicap of people on a diet, and jokes at the self-imposed austerity of vegetarians, both of whom can not freely enjoy a hearty meal, but have to remain content with non-savoury items like simple orange juice.

Wodehouse is equally effusive, in *Jeeves and the Old School Chums*, in describing a magnificent picnic lunch with four-fold sandwiches and a rich assortment of nonvegetarian dishes and drinks, with a few vegetarian menus thrown in :

"Ham sandwiches and tongue sandwiches and potted meat sandwiches and game sandwiches, and hard-boiled eggs and lobster and a cold chicken and sardines and a cake and a couple of bottles of Bollinger and some old brandy."

And to add to the joke of the situation, the bottles last listed nobody ever gets round to for 'my man', Jeeves, for the best of reasons. People rather fail to put them in the dickey of the car.

Another superb meal which was not eaten for psychological reasons was the one at Brinkley Court. Bertie had advised everyone at the table to push the dishes aside untasted. This self-denial was no easy matter for those present, in consideration of their avidity and the excellent quality of the food offered. The 'browsing and sluicing' was of the highest quality. There was particularly one dish—the *nonnettes de poulet Agnes Sorel*, and still another no less attractive, *cepes a'la Rossini*, which "tested resolution to the utmost." No wonder that the unpleasant situation, of non-participation of the dinner led to the resignation of Anatole.

The character of Anatole in the story may be regarded as the very

impersonation of the spirit of unqualified straightforward appreciation of great cooking, of elaborate preparation and magnificent serving of food. On how many and frequent occasions does he move in and out of the story with an apparently interminable succession of most varied menus ! And every flourish of a fresh dish is splendidly punctuated by ever-new fits of exciting temperaments, now effusive in joy and then over-brimming with wonder, but always taking the fullest relish and interest, and never indifferent to such a vital things as food and its disposal.

In sharp contrast to jolly meals in which everyone takes a hearty interest there come some meals which are designed to shock the sensibility of all students of the subject. When Bingo Little is in love with the waitress in the bunshop he blushes, looking like the Souls Awakening done in pink, and orders a cup of cocoa, cold veal-and-ham pic, a slice of fruit cake and a macaroon, and offers Bertie Wooster a bit of hot steak-pudding with a sparkling limado to wash it down. On this Bertie rightly observes,

"The way love can change a fellow is really frightful to contemplate. This was a man I had seen in happier days telling the head waiter at Claridge's exactly how he wanted the chef to prepare the *sole frite an gourmet aux champignous*, and saying he would jolly well sling it back if it was n't just right".

Wodehouse's Jeeves shudders at another meal which is remarkable in a way. This is the Tea party Bertie gives to the Sons of the Red Dawn. It is High Tea provided with plenty : muffins, jam, ham, cake, scrambled eggs, and five or six wagon-loads of sardines. Bertie's observation too are remarkable :

"Funny how one changes as the years roll on.. At school, I remember, I would cheerfully have sold my soul for scrambled eggs and sardines at five in the afternoon : but somehow since reaching man's estate I had rather dropped out of the habit, and I am bound to admit I was appealed to a goodish extent at the way the sons and daughters of the Revolution shoved their head down and went for the foodstuffs."

In the description of food by writers like 'Saki' and Evelyn Waugh there is found a more cautious attitude towards the quantity consumed and a more religious feeling for its quality than in Dickens. There has come a marked change in the evolution of tastes and fashions in food. What had been neglected as petty came to be looked up as pretty enough.

For instance, 'oysters, which in Dickens's time were the food of the poor, are now a particularly cherished luxury of the rich, and one finds Saki's young men eating recherche little meals in which they take a great

interest in the exact preparation of the hollandaise sauce to go with the asperagus.'

In one of his stories Saki almost approaches a Dickensian magnificence in description of food. *The Chaplet* is about Monsieur Aristide Sancourt, Chef of the Grand Sybaris Hotel, who has a speciality which he has brought to a pitch of perfection that almost amounts to scandal. It is *Canetons a la mode d' Ambleve*.

Saki starts on a high pitch right from the menu card :

"In thin gilt lettering on the creamy white of the menu how little those words conveyed to the bulk of the imperfectly educated diners. And yet how much specialized effort had been lavished, how much carefully treasured love had been ungarnered, before those six words could be written. In the Department of Deux-Sevres ducklings had lived peculiar and beautiful lives and died in the odour of satiety to furnish the main theme of the dish ; champignous, which even a purist for Saxon English would have hesitated to address as mushrooms, had contributed their languorous atrophied bodies to the garnishing, and a sauce devised in the twilight reign of the Fifteenth Louis had been summoned back from the imperishable past to take its part in this wonderful confection".

There is a world of difference between this presentation by Saki and Dickens's roast goose at Mrs. Cratchit's in *the Christmas Carol*. While Dickens took just a human interest in food, Saki's approach to his chosen dish is essentially sensuous.

In Evelyn Waugh's treatment of food, humour overflows from a rare amalgam of Dickensian humanity and zest in eating with Saki's excess of gourmandise sensuousness, and a touch of the queer and the grotesque superadded. The entire outlay—both ingredients and equipage of food, the characters of diners and the amenities available—suggests an Alice-in-the-Wonderland sort of fancifulness and whimsicality in its atmosphere.

In Waugh's *Helena*, at the court of old King Cole, he has an opportunity denied to many other writers : it is the fantastic arrangement for his diners to visit the vomitorium during a meal and thus extend it indefinitely. And the ladies of the court do not loll in many styles deep in the cushions to be fed by a whole retinue of liveried slaves ; they sumptuously squat square to their victuals at a low table, roll back their sleeves, in the manner of children far below their age, and thrust their hands well into the pot.

Then follows the usual elaboration of the contents of the table :

"The plain but abundant fare comprised oysters stewed with saffron, boiled crabs, soles fried in butter, sucking-pig seethed in milk, roast capons, titbits of lamb spitted between slices of onion, a simple sweet

confection of honey and eggs and cream, and a deep Samian pitcher of home-brewed mead"—a complete list of items for chewing, sucking, licking and drinking. Whether the description is purely imaginary or is based on reality, it reflects the genuine relish of a healthy eater.

In *Scoop* Waugh improvises a meal no less imposing than that described in *Helena*. It is indeed too rich to be digested even by the toughest stomach. A good assortment of meat secured from the triple sources of water, air and land, of fish and birds and quadrupeds, composes the dishes. And the meal gains its point particularly from the fact that the host, the mysterious Mr. Baldwin, has only that day arrived in the backwoods by parachute. Even this man with a rough life is afraid that the stuff may be rather tough for him:

"They had scraped up fresh river fish and stewed them with white wine and aubergines ; also a rare local bird which combined the tender flavour of partridge with the solid bulk of the turkey ; they had roasted it and stuffed it with bananas, almonds and red peppers, also a baby gazelle which they had seethed with truffles in its mother's milk ; also a dash of feathery arab pastry and a heap of unusual fruits".

Confronted with all this, Mr. Baldwin observes,

"Well, I suppose it will not hurt us to rough it for once".

The utterance, let us imagine, is punctuated by a sucking in of a watering mouth, and not unaccompanied by an involuntary sigh.

From Dickens to Waugh : an unbroken tradition in gastronomical humour.

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# IMAGE AND SYMBOL IN DICKENS \*

AMITABHA SINHA

## I

AN examination of Dickens's images and symbols is necessary, granting the recent, and to my mind just, cautions against an "extreme" approach to them.<sup>1</sup> The subject is far from exhausted, notwithstanding the admirable work done in this direction since Edmund Wilson.<sup>2</sup> Mostly, such criticisms are indications rather than fullscale explorations of the images. Then again, while the items seem to be all there in these commentaries, "fog", "dust", "river", and so forth, quite a few are not, as I shall try to show. This essay, however, does not hold any ambitious project of saying something entirely new on the subject. It will be concerned with simple tasks : making a fresh examination of the images and symbols in the light of the possibilities left by earlier criticism, describing Dickens's skill in building them into his fictional structure, and making a general estimate—which is not usually done.

Certain dangers latent in a discussion of Dickens's images and symbols, however, require to be pointed out—especially if it be of recurrent patterns, which this essay will largely deal with. For, Dickens's novels literally bulge with the prodigious persistence of such "old-fashioned" elements as vitality, incident, character, humour, commentary, and so forth. An attempt to draw a neat graph of images and symbols in isolation is liable to overlook large parts of meanings which these elements express. Moreover, such an attempt may lead to the discovery of meanings where they do not exist—which is especially true of Dickens who was not of the type of novelists to load every rift with the ore of symbolism—, so that the haystack would seem to bristle with needles, as it were. Finally, this may lead to the discovery of "symbols" which are not deliberate techniques used by the author but are unconscious betrayals of his subjectivity (necessary for biography but not for the exploration of fictional art.) I shall, therefore, look at those images and symbols which have the author's consent, so to say, perform functions which could not

\* Page-references, when necessary for intricate textual exposition, are to the *New Oxford Illustrated Dickens*, Geoffrey Cumberlege, O. U. P., London. As far as possible, I have made chapter-references.

have been done in another manner, and take into consideration meanings and nuances reflected by other, non-imaginistic elements. Although my general concern will be with the recurrent patterns, I shall pay proper attention to their local functions, too. At this stage I should state—in order to avoid any confusion that by "Image" and "Symbol" I shall mean any metaphorical and symbolical association, whether figurative or in objects—in descriptions as well in narration. It requires to be pointed out that in Dickens these appear mostly in descriptions ; this is not of the least importance, for these descriptions with their lush details indicate the tremendous charge of local vitality through which Dickens's recurrent patterns find their effects.

My own findings agreeing with the general view that images and symbols become prominent in Dickens's later novels—to my mind from the 1850's onward—I shall concentrate on what I find to be the most representative images in such novels, making a selective survey. However, the earlier novels are not altogether without imaginistic references. For instance, the recurrent fire set by the rioters in *Barnaby Rudge* (1841) ; the fire is not merely a repeated activity, but also the externalization of their deep motive of destruction (so that they are almost invariably prompted to set things ablaze ; e. g., Chs. LIV, LV, LVI, LXIV, LXV, LXVII, LXVIII.) Or, in the same novel, Barnaby's queer, weird, talking raven acts as the radiation of the animalistic diabolism which the half-wit Barnaby shows (e. g., Chs. LVIII, LVIV, LXII, LXIII.) Then, in *Pickwick* (1836-37), we have the symbolic equation made by Sam Weller between the caged bird and the debtors' prison, which John Killham has pointed out,<sup>3</sup> and *Oliver Twist* (1838) is full of nightmare-images, which have been mentioned, for instance, by Arnold Kettle<sup>4</sup>. However, these are mostly emblems in their simplest form, and are, rather too obvious, without much of oblique art. In the later novels, as we shall see, there is obliquity, complexity, and variety, and a greater relevance to the meanings of the novels.

## II

It would be well to start by looking at those images which are localized in a context. I would re-emphasize that it is his locally vitalized descriptions which largely contribute to the meanings of Dickens's image—and symbol-patterns (although occurrences of objects or tropes, as we shall later see, also have their share), the vitality in its turn giving a rich modulating texture to the patterns. I have not scope enough to deal with this latter aspect in my general analysis of the total patterns. What is important is that in Dickens quite often this local vitality enjoys an autonomy from the rigidity of the patterns and shows its contextual, imaginistic

function. I shall give three instances, taking them from patterns I have analyzed later, to make my point clear.

At its extreme, this vitality may even tend to subvert the pattern it belongs to, as, for example, in the "light"-image that reflects Little Dorrit's feeling during the Italian journey.

Again, there would be places where they stayed the week together.....where there were winking lamps of gold and silver among pillars and arches.....where there was the mist and scent of incense: where there were pictures, fantastic images, gaudy altars, great heights and distances, all softly lighted through stained glass . . .

(*Little Dorrit*, Bk. III, Ch. III)

The effect of sensuous gorgeousness which the lamps and the stained light produces, supported by the array of other, visual and olfactory images, refers in the context of the chapter to Little Dorrit's uncomfortable and unaccustomed feeling about her father's new "fortune" (pining for her old Marshalsea prison-home, she repeatedly feels such things as unrealities). This symbolism is no doubt impressive. At the same time, however, it should be noticed that it disrupts the pattern made of "artificial light"-images in the novel by going against its general significances—which I have analyzed later.

Sometimes, while conforming to the general pattern, a local metaphor gives an extra load of meaning to it, which goes beyond the original. Thus, for instance, the description of the river, as the train moves across it in *Our Mutual Friend*:

Then the train rattled..... until it shot over across the river : bursting over the surface like a bomb-shell.....A little more, and again it roared across the river, a great rocket : spurning the watery turnings and doublings with ineffable contempt, and going straight to its end, as Father Time goes to his. To whom it is no matter what living waters run high or low, reflect the heavenly lights and darkness, produce their little growth of weeds and flowers, turn here, turn there, are noisy or still, are troubled or at rest, for their course has one sure termination.....

(Bk. IV, Ch. XI)

In the context of the general "river"-pattern of the novel, the significance of the passage lies in the long last clause, which transcends and moulds the diverse meanings of the river into the sense of "death", that we shall see later. Yet, while not disturbing this general significance, the weight of the passage consists in the additional complication of the image of rushing supercilious Time in the train. The load of its metaphysical

significance—absorbing the “river” through the parallelism of “straight to its end” and “one sure termination”—easily pulls it out of the general pattern.

Or, such a local image, through its vitality, simply produces such an effect which, while belonging within the pattern, yet makes it an independent entity. This we see, for instance, in the image of the sea in *Dombey and Son*:

The waves are hoarse with repetition of their mystery ; the dust lies piled upon the shore; the sea-birds soar and hover; the winds and clouds go forth upon the tremendous flight; the white arms beckon, in the moonlight, to the invisible country far away (Ch. XLI).

This fully conforms to the significance of the adventures and the marvels of “sea” in the novel. However, apart from its descriptive value, the passage through the piling up of its components (“waves”, “dust”, “sea-birds”, “winds and clouds”) and imagistic words (“trackless”, “white”, “invisible”)—becomes a local image of the romance of the sea that can be enjoyed in its own right even if the pattern were forgotten.

The significance of this local vitality perhaps has a bearing also on Dickens’s patterns. For, such instances show that—let alone the fact of its overriding the general pattern-meanings—Dickens’s imagination even in the limited scope of a context refuses to get bogged down into a chiselled artifice: excessive vitality must breathe through it, exactly as in the intensification of his episodes. Examples cannot be multiplied here, but they are incorporated in my discussions of the patterns below.

### III

Now, the patterns. I would begin by analyzing those images which operate in limited contexts of a novel and reflect part of its meaning. First, I shall discuss images with a fixed meaning, which I shall follow with those with multiple meanings.

An elementary instance, showing how Dickens imaginistically transmutes the background of a situation, is in the “mist” accompanying the Dover Mail journey in *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859.) As Jarvis Lorry proceeds with other passengers in the carriage, a “steaming mist” rises up the hill “like an evil spirit”; after some time, Jerry—as the unknown rider on horse-back—gallops up, his voice calling “from the mist”, and mysterious messages are exchanged between him and Lorry; the episode over, “heavy wreaths” of mist close round the coach (Ch. II.) The mist, while it stands in its own right as atmosphere-creating background, thus metaphorically externalizes the mystery of the situation (its “closing round”)

parallel to the passengers' mystification about Lorry's message, "Redeemed to Life") and also forebodes the general theme of mystery and evil in the later sections of the novel.

Dickens, however, is capable of greater complexity even in such "fixed" images. The "marsh-mist" cluster in the first stage of *Great Expectations* (1862) is a typical example, appearing in descriptions and figures and refracting in the contextual variations the sense of evil, mystery, and oppression which dominates Pip's childhood and of which he seeks to be free. In the opening description of the novel, before and after the terrifying and mysterious Magwitch's arrival, the marsh wears a black aspect, representing Pip's typically dismal state of mind. The "wilderness" is "dark", the sea from where the wind blows to the marsh is "a savage lair" (the source of evil, referring to Magwitch's approach), the marsh itself is a "long black horizontal line" and the sky above it a mixture of red and black; the only two things that stand upright are "black things" (Ch. I.). In a subsequent context, the mist rises from the marsh and, intensified in the typically Dickensian repetitive style, conforms to the terror and mystery in Pip's meeting with Magwitch and Compeyson (Ch. III); the same imagistic correspondence continues in the hunt for the convicts in the marshes in wind and rain—again, a "dismal wilderness" (Ch. V.). This sense of mystery and horror colours the image of the smoke of fire in Miss Havisham's chamber as "our own marsh mist" and thereby makes the smoke a metaphor of the dismal darkness of Miss Havisham's personality (Ch. XI). Somewhat later, the villain Orlick, after he has attacked and stunned Mrs. Gargery, is met by Pip in a heavy mist that rises from the marshes. (Ch XV—the marsh-association of Orlick is repeated in his attack on Pip in Chs. LII-LIII.) The total meaning of the marsh-mist that accumulates through all these contextual functions—spiritual obfuscation and feeling of evil—is most powerfully expressed in the casual metaphor in Pip's decision on the eve of his journey to London to "finish off the marshes", that is, his early childhood life. (Ch. XIX.) At the same time, Pip's blunder in his "gentlemenliness" is ironically rendered in terms of the marshes which invariably accompany him; when he returns from Miss Havisham, with "Joe's furnace flinging a path of fire" (Ch. XI): but Pip does not realize at this time that Joe is, and ultimately will prove to be, the way out of his "marsh"-life.

Quite often, however, Dickens's images, even in limited contexts, propel themselves towards a greater variety of meaning. Even the "marsh"- "mist" of *Great Expectations* tends to this direction. For example, the mist, rising on the eve of Pip's journey to London, not only refers to the

evils of his childhood, but also ironically refers to a new meaning, the evil of his future life. (Ch. XIX) Again, the coming sun on the morning of the episode of Magwitch's escape is imaged as "a marsh of fire" (Ch. LIII.) This obviously stands for Pip's feelings of joy and hope, and at the same time is underlined by the irony of the terror and violence waiting for him.

Such an image with a changing meaning, which also offers structural links, is what can be called "underground" in *Hard Times* (1854), coloured no doubt by the background of the Coketown coal-pits in the story. First, it apparently acts with a fixed meaning in the comedy of Mrs. Sparsit's "Staircase"-image (Dickens calls it "allegorical fancy") of the married Louisa's affair with James Harthouse as climbing "down, down, down" a "staircase, with a *dark pit of shame and ruin at the bottom.*" The image is continually hammered, with words like "pit", "gulf" and "bottom" as Mrs. Sparsit keeps watching the gradually intensifying drama. (Chs. XXVI, XXVII, italics mine.) What is interesting is that this is immediately, and subtly preceded by the image of a voice going to the dying Mrs. Gradgrind's ears—"taking such a long time in getting down...that she might have been *lying at the bottom of a well*" (Ch. XXV, italic mine)—the "well", a variant of pit, of course referring to death. One of the subsequent images of Louisa's affair—descent "to the black gulfs at the bottom" is followed immediately by the narration of Mr. Gradgrind's learning of his wife's death and "burying" her (Ch. XXVII)—so that the image acquires an ambiguity from the ironical juxtaposition of physical and moral collapse. All this, however, is a preparation for the big event where the actuality and the image meet: the fall of Stephen Blackpool—who, though innocent, is charged with robbery—in the disused Old Hell Shaft, followed by his death. (Ch. XXXIV.) "The dark pit of shame and ruin" in Mrs. Sparsit's image, thus becomes ironically true of Stephen—although he is redeemed from it in his death.

Greater symbolic quality accrues to the "sea" in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870), Dickens's last novel, with more complex variety in meaning and a subtler illumination of character and structure. It first appears in an image of the Cathedral music: the monotonous mutter of the service is "drowned...in a sea of music" which rises and falls, and then goes "dry". (Ch. IX.) Later, we see another meaning in "sea", when Crisparkle contrasts the "wild and noisy sea"—here an actuality and not a figure—with the quietness of his abode, while the Landless brother and sister go by. (Ch. X). Here the sea metaphorically refers to the Landlesses, especially Neville, whose wildness is explicit in the story, and this meaning is reinforced in Helena's subsequent declaration of her liking for the sea. (*Ibid.*)

"Sea" assumes a more important meaning in respect of Jasper whose house is imaged as a lighthouse, which stands on "the margin of the tide of busy life" ( Ch. XIV ), and the gates of which the "waves" cannot pass. ( Ch. XII ). We understand the complex symbolism of the images if we remember the earlier association of "sea" with church-music and the fact that Jasper himself is the choir-master. This gives meaning to "lighthouse" as an externalized as well as figurative image of the opium-crazy, guiltridden, "dark" aspect of Jasper's split personality, to which he retires in his hatred of Church service and sacred values; ( See, e.g. ch. III.) This meaning of "lighthouse" is rendered in terms of narrative action when Datchery, imaged as a mariner "on a dangerous voyage," approaches the "warning light" of Jasper's lighthouse. ( Ch. XXIII ). Not only does it reflect Datchery's mystified feeling ; the symbolism clearly gives a clue to the mystery never solved in this unfinished novel—for the implication is that the detective would finally track down the murder in Jasper. Dickens, however, seems to give an inexhaustible supply of meanings even to this secondary image. For, the sea suggests yet another significance—in the emergence of the Sailor Tartar near the end, who has a "Sea-going air" even in his chambers ( Chs. XXI, XXII ). Rosa, who is developing an emotional relationship with him, after Edwin's disappearance, revives her spirits by reading books of voyages and adventures. ( Ch. XII. ) "Sea", by implication, thus illuminates the sense of hope and regeneration that underlies this novel of decay and gloom. Pushed on so many levels of meaning, and linking up diverse characters and areas of action, "sea" thus nearly approaches what the late E. K. Brown called an "expanding symbol".<sup>6</sup>

#### IV

At least in limited areas of a novel, therefore, images and symbols are important aspects of Dickens's fictional rhetoric,—both structurally and as devices for reflecting meanings. I now turn to pervasive images and symbols those which dominate the total structures of novels and, as such, are of greater importance, at least in weightage ( some of these contain limited images, too, as we shall see. ). The first anticipation of such images, to my mind, is found even before the '50's—as far back as in *Dombey and Son* ( 1846. ) Once more, this is the persistently Dickensian "sea", although on a much simple level. Its importance is felt from the beginning of the novel, in the image of Mrs. Dombey's death. ( Ch. I. ) It is subsequently associated with a greater prominence to the hero Walter Gay, in its marvellous, adventurous, romantic aspect. ( e.g., Chs. IV, IX. ) This aspect is related more powerfully to young Paul and Florence,

especially the former whose imagination is haunted by visions of sea in moonlight and starlight. ( e.g., Chs. VIII, XIII, XIV, XVI. ) In Paul's case, the romantic aspect is finally associated with his death; in which the image of his mother's death richly reverberates. ( Ch. XVI. ) The connexion of the sea with Walter and Florence anticipates the later voyages in the novel, where the sea becomes the symbolic agent of their union. ( Chs. XIX, XXXII, LVI-LVII. ) The emotional overtone of this meaning is consummated in the "voices of the waves" as the image of "eternal and illimitable"-love in Florence's heart for Walter and Paul ( Ch. LVII ). "Sea" thus becomes an imagistic radiation of her personality. The reunion of her father and Florence, the conclusion of the novel, is also celebrated in sea-terms, since it comes through Florence's son "born at Sea" ( Ch. LIX ), followed by the walk of the family on the beach. ( Ch. LXII. )

What one feels, though, about this pattern in *Dombey* is that, notwithstanding its over-all nature, it is not central to the book's meaning. For it bears only upon Florence's area of interest in the novel, but not upon Dombey's, who is at the centre ( despite occasional "sea"-references to him. ) Moreover, the "marvellous" meaning of the sea, redolent of death and metaphysics, is not carried to a satisfactory conclusion.

For a central as well as pervasive pattern, one had at first better look at *Edwin Drood*. The different mysteries of this novel have been much explored—for instance, Datchery's identity, the possible conclusion of the novel, and so forth, but not so much of the Cathedral which impresses the novel throughout with a semi-mystic presence.

To start with, the Cathedral represents the novel's theme, the decay of ancient, moral glory and beauty, and what has rightly been observed, the split in English civilization (the High Church Anglicanism being a symbol of this), as embodied in Jasper's split personality. The hoary, ancient aspect of the Cathedral and its city, untouched by modern times and in a state of decay ( the name Cloisterham is itself suggestive ) is time and again buttressed through such words and phrases as "another and a bygone time", "hoarse", "throat of old time", "mouldy sigh", "voices of their nursery time", and through images of decay as "rusty", "dusty", "sepulchral", "tomb", in its descriptions. ( e.g., pp. 1, 8, 19, 55, 93, 154, 177.)

The keynote of the symbolism is struck with the Cathedral's first appearance on the opening page, seen from Jasper's point of view, all its values drowned by his opium-crazy vision :

An *ancient English Cathedral Tower*? How can the *ancient English Cathedral* be here ! The well-known massive grey square

of the *old Cathedral*? How can that be here! There is no *spike of rusty iron* in the air...from any point of the *real prospect*... Maybe it is set up by the Sultan's orders...It is so, for cymbals clash, and the Sultan goes by to his palace...still the Cathedral Tower rises in the background, *where it cannot be*, and still no *writhing figure* is on the *grim spike*...Stay! Is the spike so low a thing as the *rusty spike* on the top of an *old bedstead* that has tumbled all *awry*.

The repetition of the adjectives "old" and "ancient" in respect of the Cathedral, in combination with the repetition of interrogations and interjections and such phrases as "real prospect", immediately suggests the theme of non-existence of values : "awry" in the grimly comic image confirms it. The "writhing figure", in a kind of inverted symbolism, suggests crucifixion, not without an association with the crusade-theme in the Oriental imagery—with Jasper of course taking the Satanic, anti-Christ stand. The idea is reinforced at the end of the chapter, but from the other point of view of Jasper's "normal" personality, when he goes to attend his duty as choir-master : to the sensually and spiritually "jaded" Jasper, the Cathedral, just like life is to him, is drained of all values. It is here "massive", "grey",—echoing the phrase in the former passage—the choir get on their "sullied" robes, and the service, "When the Wicked Man" suggests the wistful desire for salvation in Jasper's guiltridden mind (p.4.)

Dickens does not of course force us to accept this meaning, or meaninglessness, of the Cathedral—making it come through the "unreliable" narrative medium of Jasper's feelings. But the cancellation of old values—not merely religious—is symbolized in Cathedral terms from other points of view, too. When Edwin and Rosa cancel their engagement in the precincts of the Cathedral, "the old city lay red", "For they (Edwin and Rosa) were old already" (p. 152); the "oldness" of the Cathedral and Cloisterham and the "oldness" of their "engagement" are subtly associated together. Then again, as the action fast approaches Edwin's disappearance—in which the theme of denial of values is concentrated—, the Cathedral clock assumes an increasingly, symbolic value. It chimes with an ominous symbolism as Neville and Edwin go simultaneously, but unseen by one another, to the fatal dinner (pp. 159, 162). On that night of Edwin's disappearance—no doubt with Jasper's complicity—a storm blows, and in a spate of terrific symbolism, "the hands of the Cathedral clock are torn off", even before the disappearance is discovered (p.168.). It seems that all the values of the Cathedral are gone with the act : Time has come to a stop. Jasper's vision after all seems to be true.



shade of Murder striking at her heart," while, in the "melancholy" riverside wilderness, the tidal swell breaks at her feet (p. 70.) As the story shows, the supposed drowning of John Harmon is for money, and by a person who himself is instead murdered with the same motive; Bradley's jealousy, which makes him nearly murder and pitch Eugene into the river, partly derives from his feelings about his own poverty; the drowning both of Bradley and Riderhood is owing to the latter's pursuit of the former for money; and so forth. The drowning-associations of most of these are no doubt a metaphor of the overwhelming of human values by money.

On another and an opposite level of meaning, "river" has an idyllic, purifying aspect, referring to "liberation"—liberation, for instance, in terms of love and union. Thus, not only does Lizzie's and Eugene's relationship consummate, after their ordeal, by the pastoral riverside (Bk. IV, Ch. XI); but even their first meeting took place in the London riverside (this transmutes the city-river in a regenerative manner), as Lizzie perpetually reminds us (e.g. pp. 34, 527, 528.) The same meaning is seen in Bella's union with Rokesmith, also after her ordeal (comic though it is): as their reconciliatory meeting is linked up with the river while its "great, serene mirror" reflects what is "peaceful, pastoral, and blooming" (p. 522.) "River" is liberation in another sense for Betty Higden who takes the course of the pastoral Thames in her flight from shame and terror, and eventually finds in it as she dies by the river—the "tender" end of her journey (pp. 504-12).

Allied to "liberation", but distinguished from it, is the well-known suggestion of "regeneration". As the main line of the story goes; John Harmon is drowned but is brought back to life as Rokesmith. This figurative regeneration is counterpointed on the one hand by Riderhood and on the other by Eugene. Riderhood's rescue, after his drowning (Bk. III, Ch. III), only to be followed by his drowning to death later, just shows his incapacity for regeneration. The more important case of Eugene's rescue from drowning by Lizzie after Bradley's assault on him (Bk. IV, Ch. VI) is symbolical of his moral regeneration. Lizzie being so much below her station, Eugene would not at first marry her, for all his love for her. The river as such is felt to be hostile to him in the tremendous irony of its presentation in the assault-scene. While Eugene is going to meet Lizzie after tracking her down in the paper mill, the afternoon river—conforming to his mental state—is pastorally tranquil and peaceful (pp. 689, 690; foreshadowed in p. 629.) This is ironical, for, after nine pages, the pastoral perspective of the night's reflection in the river (from Eugene's angle) suddenly changes as Bradley pounces upon

him and, with a dreadful crash, "the reflected night turned crooked" (p. 698.) Months later, when his prospect of living is still uncertain, Eugene gets rid of his moral weakness and determines to marry Lizzie (pp.741-42); and he fully recovers from the effects of drowning, only after this moral regeneration is completed in his marriage with Lizzie (p.752 )

Beyond all these meanings, the river has a transcendental significance. This appears in an image in the course of an omniscient commentary near the end of the novel (in the context of the Eugene-episode), where Time does not care for the river's activities except its final aim to reach the sea—the sea by implication being death (p.751, quoted above.)

Sure enough, this meaning blends and transcends various other images and meanings of the river as death, that we have seen above of the river is thus two-fold : on the one hand Dickens shows admirable control by keeping it fairly away from the comic, Boffin sub-area of the action which is kept for the dry and satiric "dust-mound"; on the other hand he makes it cover the central interests of the action so that it gives a structural control over the novel.

The typically Dickensian imagination which such multiple-level, pervasive patterns show is at its highest in a number of such patterns simultaneously reflecting the novel's meanings from different directions and interweaving with one another. While other novels, even *Our Mutual Friend*, show this, the most representative instances are in three broad patterns in *Little Dorrit* (1857.)

While the novel has claimed attention for its "prison" symbol or "emblem", as Lionel Trilling calls it,<sup>7</sup> the prison to my mind is rather a theme than an image or a symbol. The metaphorical associations in the novel lie elsewhere—among them the three patterns I shall discuss, which I am not aware of having been critically discussed so far. These three are "sun", "light" and "fire"—actually two, if we consider that the second derives from the first. Yet, in the novel, the sun has an autonomy in status as a heavenly body moving in its course in the sky, and with associations of heat, which distinguishes it from light. I shall, therefore, consider "sun" with its related aspect of sunshine and non-solar "light" as separate images.

The all consuming structure which "sun" gives to the novel is revealed in its occurrence in the beginning and the ending (pp. 1,826.) Moreover, the tolerant and broad outlook in "the sunshine and shade" of the ending, widening into the metaphysical association of "sun" with the "pilgrimage of life" (p.27), indicates Dikens's panoramic view of life in this novel, for all his criticism of money and society. The importance of "sun", however, consists in more complex meanings.

The first meaning is "freedom" as opposed to the darkness of imprisonment and evil. In the opening scene, the blazing sun beating at the Marseilles is contrasted with its dark interior where Blandois/Rigaud and Cavalletto lodge (Ch. I)—the "blaze" an implicit denunciation of the evil Blandois, which is later confirmed by the "wrathful sunset" by which he arrives at Mrs. Clennam's house (p. 124.) With this is juxtaposed the more typical sun in relation to Marshal sea where some good people live. The sun rays on the spikes of Marshal sea make them look "cruel", while Mr. and Little Dorrit are there, which is contrasted with the sunrise on Nature, standing for full freedom (p. 231). Much later, the hot sun is associated with Clennam in Marshal sea (p.720), and, as he is to be released, Little Dorrit comes in with the sunshine (p. 824.) On another level of meaning, the sun is associated with "material fortune". This absorbs the former meaning when Mr. Dorrit is released upon his unexpectedly coming into money ; as he receives the news, he is ' in the sunlight by the window", "bright upon the wall and the spikes" (p. 418.) Later on this meaning becomes more prominent when Mr. Dorrit sits in the glow of his fortune in "the brilliant light of a bright Italian-day" (p. 478), and when, forgetting his past, he makes his journey with the sun "shining on his equipage" (pp. 634-35; also see p. 428.) This suggestion even ignites such a stray image as of the waters of Venice and the ruins of Rome "sunning themselves for the pleasure of the Dorrit family" (p. 514.) "Sun" as "fortune" is connected also to the money-magnate, Mr. Merdle (e.g. p 614) and to Casby who, with the "heated" and angry Pancks near him, drinks golden sherry as if he were "drinking the evening sunshine" (p. 797.)

The sun, above all, symbolizes goodness, opposed to evil, with different connotations. For example, the cheerful, "sun-browned", Meagles's face is "like a sun" ( pp. 810, 822 ) ; the sun rises above the mud when Cavalletto runs away from Blandois ( p. 134 ) and becomes warm when Blandois fades out of little Dorrit's mind ( p. 457 ) ; finally, the collapse of Mrs. Clennam's gloomy house is immediately followed by the early sun ( p. 794. ) The meaning of "sun" as "goodness", however, converges on Little Dorrit. This is well brought out in the confrontation between Mrs. Clennam's "black figure in the shade" and Little Dorrit looking from "the softened light of the window to the shining sky" ( p. 792. ) This goodness, imbued with a Christian Symbolism, is consummated in Little Dorrit's and Clennam's marriage, with "the sun shining upon them through the painted figure of Christ" ( p. 825—this Christian association is fore-shadowed in p. 773) and then in "the fresh perspective of the street in the autumn morning sun's bright rays" ( p. 826. ) The final

concentration of the sun's meaning on Little Dorrit thus indeed confirms the cover-design of the novel's original edition in monthly parts, where Little Dorrit stands in the centre in a shaft of sunlight.<sup>8</sup>

Non-solar "light" in the form of candles, lamps, light from the source of fire, etc. is based on the persistently Dickensian "light vs darkness" background. One of its functions is to intensify darkness, the latter standing for mystery, guilt, and evil. Scattered in diverse images, this links up different areas of darkness in the novel: for example, Affery's thoughts of the possibility of Little Dorrit's murder by candlelight (p. 53); the reflection of Bridge Lamps in the water "like demon eyes, with a terrible fascination in them for guilt and misery" (p. 174); Flora's image of the "country.....dark with lanterns and umbrellas (p. 152); the lamp borne by the dirty old woman in the evil Miss Wade's house" (p. 326); and so forth. This meaning is especially seen in the light perpetually burning in Mrs. Clennam's dark, depressing house (e.g. pp. 31, 178-79, 681, 789), contrasted with the sun ray seldom touching it. Mrs. Clennam's light takes on a special significance in relation to Affery who contributes both to the mystery of the house and its solution in light-term—the latter being in full knowledge of the secrets of the house, suggested by her physical association with "lamp" (e.g. pp. 34, 41, 352, 544, 549.) As she later reveals the secrets (Bk. IV, Ch. XXX), some time after Clennam has asked her to "light us" down the stairs in order to throw "light...on' the secrets of this house" (pp. 686-89), the figurative and actual images of light (mystery and solution) are ironically juxtaposed.

A special gradation of the meaning of "evil" attaches itself to light in respect of the villain Blandois, mixing with the light of Mrs. Clennam's house. We see this, for instance, in the suggestion of Blandois's evil nature by the "fitful illumination" of the dull glare of Flintwrinch's matches (p. 348) or when the flickering street-lamp throws finger-like shadows on hand-bills advertising Blandois's disappearance (pp. 625-26)—which give special meaning to the so many casual references in the novel to Blandois's association with candles and lamps. Yet, beneath this level of "evil," a fourth meaning of hope and cheer, reflecting the typical Dickensian optimism, is suggested by light: in characterizations, for instance, of Meagles, Clennam, and Little Dorrit, and in the presentation of cheerful indoors (e.g. pp. 165, 266, 338, 422, 432.)

The "fire"—image has a greater range of meanings: "homeliness", to which is associated "human warmth"; "timelessness"; "destruction"—both good and evil; "the evil deriving from money"; and "cheer and happiness"—a fair index of the novel's subject-matter.

At the lowest level is "homeliness", issuing forth from grates and hearths. This has a special significance in respect of Mr. Dorrit, accustomed for a long time to his life in Marshalsea, of which fire is a symbol to him. Usually, he is fond of dozing near the fire to which he goes for spiritual relief ( e.g., pp. 441, 445, 625, 629.) Further, his internal tension between the past life and the present state of wealth ( from where all homeliness is gone ) is very well reflected in fire-terms. This we see, for instance, in his jealousy at seeing his brother and Little Dorrit sitting by the fire, which reminds him of his similar sessions with her in the past ( pp. 639, 640. ) The associated "warmth of human heart" is also suggested by "fire". This we see in such instances as Clennam's turning the warmth of fire upon Little Dorrit in a gush of pity ( pp. 167, 170 ) or in his own image of flowers given to him by Chivery as "cheering of a fire" to cold hands ( p. 756 ), and so forth ( also see pp. 165 176, 194. )

The fire in Mrs. Clennam's house has the totally different suggestion of timelessness—which compliments candlelight. The invalid Mrs. Clennam, thriving on her memory of her revenge and the secret she could not burn away—motives that date back to fifteen years ago—is, always linked with the fire (as with the light) which burns in her grate "like the night and day for fifteen years", accompanied by associated images of death and decay (e.g., pp. 33, 47, 178, 353, 762—rather similar to Miss Havisham in *Great Expectations*. ) "Fire" suggests "money—evil" in relation to the pretender Merdle ( e.g., pp. 558, 561, 571 ) and to the hypocrite Casby ( p. 691—in both cases, intensifying their connexion to "sun". ) Its greater significance, however, is "destruction". This association of "fire" is suggested in the images of the characters both of Mrs. Clennam and Miss Wade ( e.g., pp. 35, 772, 779, and 659, 665 ), both of whom seek to destroy moral goodness, and in the images of the ruin of Clennam's investment ( pp. 711, 712. ) As destruction, however, "fire" is especially connected to Blandois ( here complimenting "light" ) who stands for the destruction of human values in his greed for money and the consequent crimes and blackmail. This connexion is brought out through his proximity to fire ( physically as well as in others' minds ), so that he becomes kind of an incendiary character ( see, pp. 445, 457, 793 ) : as a matter of fact, this makes his habitual smoking symptomatic of his character ( ironically, he smokes at the time of the collapse of the house which brings about his death—see p. 793. ) But fire is destruction also in a good sense, as, for instance, in the images of the reformed Cavalletto's attitude to Blandois ( pp. 134, 746 ), but most in the drama of the burning of Mrs. Clennam's secret paper

( Chs. XXX, XXXIV), which finally purges the novel's world of all its evils.

It is rather interesting that these pervasive images in *Little Dorrit* cross and recross one another at innumerable points, apart from their obvious connexions hinted at before. For instance, "fire" and "light" mix together in the presentation of Blandois's cynicism ( p. 124 ) ; the same two images gather together to illuminate Mrs. Clennam's anticipation of Blandois ( p. 179 ) ; "sun" and "fire" combine together in the imagistic description of Cavalletto's escape ( pp. 113-34 ) ; the same two again meet in the reflection of Merdle's money-status ( p. 614.) ; while some such instances have already been mentioned in the analysis above, more need not be multiplied ( see also pp. 30, 352-353, 442, 452, 638, 672, 824-25, for some more. ) Perhaps these indicate a certain incapability in Dickens to focus on one object—so that he glides on from one to another. But if this be a weakness, Dickens turns it into a virtue, for the effect of these coalescent images is cumulative, like that of an image-cluster, which seems suitable to the many layers of theme in the novel.

## V

Much has had to be necessarily left out of this discussion. But, my aim has been to show the broad features of Dickens's images and symbols rather than their subtle ramifications, and this, I hope, has been realized above. For one thing, we have seen that Dickens could rise above "emblems" to the level of intricate metaphorical associations and even to symbols. Surely, in their various functions of structural control, illumination of character, reflection of theme and meanings, the images and symbols constitute an important part of the pleasure of reading Dickens's novels. Moreover, these also hold clues to the less apparent aspects of his subject-matter : for instance, they reveal, as in *Little Dorrit* and *Our Mutual Friend*, some kind of a metaphysical view and an intricate insight into the problem of evil even in the midst of his famous social criticism.

Chronological development of images is not so important in Dickens's novels. But it is interesting indeed, when we think of the date of publication of his last novels, *Edwin Drood*, 1870, that Dickens achieved almost modern, compact organization one century ago. However, *Edwin Drood* is an exception. Usually, as we have seen, Dickens does not aspire after giving a neat, organic unity and order to his novels through the images and symbols. He was certainly no Henry James, nor a Joseph Conrad, not even a George Meredith. Unlike their works and of many others, his novels would not lose all their significances, although they would certainly suffer, if the images were taken away from them. Besides, a

certain lack of distance, a degree of obviousness and didacticism, despite all their obliquity, prevent the images and symbols, from fully "expanding" themselves (e.g. "light" in *Little Dorrit* or "sea" in *Dombey*) The pronounced "pervasiveness" of the major patterns, which perhaps indicates his incapacity for a single symbol shooting its impact throughout the novel (like Forster's "echo" in *A Passage to India*), partly shows only the Dickensian manner of establishing a thing (like his repetitive style in narration.) Then, there is a certain disarray in his images. There are plenty of inert figures in the patterns; which are not images at all but just background-illuminations or casual mentions (seen especially in, say, "candle" or "fire" which are natural parts of the *locale* of Dickens's novels.)

However, these are not faults. As we have already seen in the localized descriptions or in the interweaving patterns, this overplus of imagination, the odd ends left out by his images and symbols, is typical of Dickens's art. They renew our impression about Dickens being an excessively creative and vitalized novelist. Distinguished from the concentrated design of "modern" artists, his is rather a diffuse pattern (but pattern still), structural as well as imagistic, which has its own aesthetic value as the reflection of life's *totality*. Dickens's images and symbols, therefore, prove themselves to be a necessary part of his poetic-fictional art as imaginative parallels to the lush vitality of fact and character in his novels.<sup>6</sup>

#### REFERENCES

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3. "Pickwick, Dickens and the Art of Fiction", *Dickens and the Twentieth Century*, p. 38.
4. *An Introduction to the English Novel*, V. 1, Grey Arrow Edition, London, 1962, pp. 133-51.
5. *Rhythm in the Novel*, University of Toronto Press, reprint, 1957, p. 35.
6. Of the various discussions of the two images especial mention should be made of Robert Morse's brief but illuminating comments in "Our Mutual Friend", *The Dickens Critics*, ed. George H. Ford and Lauriat Lane, Jr., New York, 1963, pp. 205-06.
7. Introduction to *Little Dorrit*, New Oxford Illustrated Dickens, p. vi.
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# THE ADULT WORLD OF 'DOMBEY AND SON'

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SHANTA MAHALANOBIS

IN recent years there have been commendable efforts to retrieve '*Dombey and son*' from Swinburne's string of critical negatives :—

"There is nothing of a story and all that : nothing (to borrow from Martial) is bad...the story of Dombey has no plot and that a very stupid one. The struttingly offensive father and his gushingly submissive daughter are failures of the first magnitude." <sup>1</sup>

Most contemporary criticism effectively refutes this insensitive denial of Dickens' insights as a novelist in '*Dombey and Son*'. Kathleen Tillotson and J. Hillis Miller are agreed on the unity of action, design, feeling and theme in this novel,

"The relation between Mr. Dombey and Florence is the backbone of the whole book ; structurally the relation between him and Paul, and that between Florence and Paul are only means of exposing and developing it."<sup>2</sup>

Angus Wilson, in "The World of Charles Dickens"(1970) endorses "a great advance in his (Dickens') art in this novel", reflected particularly in his

"proper concern for people as human and not as units in a journalistic joke", in his relating character to theme, and to quote Tillotson again in "the interaction of characters."<sup>3</sup>

'*Dombey and Son*' has therefore been admitted to the status of an artistically mature novel in the Dickens canon. Written during a period of personal restlessness, travel and multifarious exacting commitments as author and editor, it expresses a compulsive need for an adequate artistic equivalent for the writer's disturbing inner experiences. In Europe, Dickens found the stress of writing '*Dombey and Son*' unendurable without the complement of 'streets', particularly those London streets and walks between Hungerford Stairs and Camden Town where he had walked and lounged during the blacking-factory period of his life.

"It was to these scenes with all their load of misery, resentment and shame that Dickens returned again and again in his writing, and it was

through those self-same streets that he felt urged to walk during the '*Dombey*' period—with an acuteness that he had never before known and which was steadily increasing.”<sup>4</sup>

The painful past of his father's imprisonment and his maternal grandfather's embezzlement was returning insistently with its concomitant feelings of shame, despair and hopeless isolation. He never did recover from this early *trauma* and '*Dombey and Son*' with “the work of Dickens' whole career was an attempt to digest these early shocks and hardships, to explain them to himself, to justify himself in relation to them, to give an intelligible and tolerable picture of a world in which such things could occur.”<sup>5</sup>

The childhood of Florence, Dombey's daughter, was one of his earliest attempts at artistically objectifying these “early shocks and hardships”, of understanding and controlling the desolate early experience of separation from his family and estrangement from the fireside hearth. And it is, perhaps, as a sympathetic study of deprived childhood, that '*Dombey and Son*' has won most critical acclaim, second only to the later novel, '*David Copperfield*'. The further theme of alienated childhood in the diminutive six-year old Paul Dombey, is also artistically significant.

Paul is subjected to the 'forcing' methods of Mrs. Pipchin's and Doctor Blimber's reputed educational establishments preparatory to his partnership in the House of Dombey and Son at the ripe age of sixteen. Ironically, this exclusive education, a proud and hopeful parent's gift of love, starves his sickly childhood of the sustaining warmth of human love. Latin and mathematical principles are exhausting substitutes. So he lived in a solitary world of musing fancy and

“No one understood him. Mrs. Blimber thought him ‘odd’ and sometimes the servants said among themselves that little Dombey ‘moped’, but that was all.”<sup>6</sup>

The centrality therefore of the parent-child relationship in the thematic structure of this novel is incontrovertible, and one cannot quarrel with the amply justified view of '*Dombey and Son*' as a novel pleading for children among other things,

“generally for their right to be treated as individuals instead of appendages and hindrances to parental ambition and particularly against the wrongs done to them in the name of education.”<sup>7</sup>

But there is little here of the psychological and moral complexity and the author's sensitive handling of it that is a necessary condition of an artistically nature novel. For the dichotomies and ambiguities of the adult world of Dombey, Edith, Carker and Cousin Feenix ; the inevitable interaction of characters ; social moves contending with straining individuality ;

the deliberate erosion of human norms, engage the author's finest and subtlest insights and evince full control of his medium. These, rather than the theme of childhood reveals Dickens' artistic maturity. The contradiction in Dombey's human contacts are implicit in Dickens' restrained rendering of his attitudes. His determined evasion of parental affection for his daughter derives from a peculiar complex of emotional self-distrust and emotional starvation. His arrogant egotism needs to be bolstered with the love and assurance of only such as would heighten and maintain the dignity of the House of Dombey and Son. A wife and son are indispensable in this role, a daughter totally irrelevant. He makes exacting demands on Paul and Edith, silently resenting or openly resisting the slightest evidence in them and in his first wife, of a will apart from his, of diverted affection.

"The last time he had seen his slighted child, there had been that in the sad embrace between her and her dying mother, which was at once a revelation and a reproach to him. Let him be absorbed as he would in the Son on whom he built such high hopes, he could not forget that closing scene. He could not forget that he had had no part in it."<sup>8</sup>

Nor could he erase the painful, jealous memory of his son's closer intimacy with Florence, of Edith's unselfish devotion to Florence, of Florence herself naturally and effortlessly winning the love that was his by right. Dickens repeatedly shows him at the door of his sanctum, in the midnight hours, hit by his own inadequacy as he gazes longingly upstairs at Florence gently crooning to the ailing Paul in her arms, or at Edith's glowing, tender look, washed clean of haughty disdain, as she leaves Florence's room. He retires behind the brittle and pitiful facade of a cold, fixed, unmoved demeanour.

"He might have been hung up for sale at a Russian fair as a specimen of a frozen gentleman,"<sup>9</sup> with whom "outward tokens of feeling were unusual." The jarring and discordant string within him is cruelly suppressed and hidden especially from Florence's instinctive perceptions. He is reluctant to admit it even to himself, though he burns with a consuming envy at Florence's effortless transmutations of Edith's hard, cold, proud arrogance into an eager human warmth for herself.

"As she sat down by the side of Florence, she stooped and kissed her hand. He hardly knew his wife; she was so changed. It was not merely that her smile was new to him—though that he had never seen; but her manner, the tone of her voice, the light of her eyes, the interest and confidence and winning will to please, expressed in all—this was not Edith."<sup>10</sup>

Florence is usually seen as the object of active cruelty or of love. In her own feelings, she is will-lessly passive and contrasts unfavourably with her sharply wilful, self-assertive father, who meets his match in the unbending Edith.

"A marble rock could not have stood more obduratey in his way than she."<sup>11</sup>

Repeatedly thwarted by Edith's wilful resistance he is driven to more aggressive forms of self-assertion. To her defiant

"I will do nothing that you ask",  
he unpleasantly retorts,

"I am not accustomed to ask Mrs. Dombey". "I direct."

Yet Dickens, intending to identify Florence with the force of human love, the novel's apparently strongest positive, makes her more powerful than Dombey in her very will-lessness. With Edith, as with Paul, she triumphs where he loses

"Again, his neglected child at this rough passage of his life, put forth by even this rebellious woman as powerful where he was powerless, and everything where he was nothing."<sup>12</sup>

In Dombey, Dickens presents a determined and sustained effort at emotional self-denial, until little by little, more and more the wall of pride crumbles and in his total rejection by his son, his wife, his flattering friend and his riches, he feels an urgent need to love and be loved by his one true friend, his daughter. And yet, his habit of pride was so deeply ingrained that

"If he could have seen her in the street, and she had done more than look at him as she had been used to look, he would have passed on with his old cold unforgiving face and not addressed her or relaxed it, though his heart should have broken soon afterwards."<sup>13</sup>

Julian Moynahan acutely perceives his complexity

"In Dombey, Dickens created a permanently valid image of 19th century Economic Man in all the unyielding pride of his power and the pathos and repulsiveness of his blighted heart."<sup>14</sup>

Wholly conditioned by the 19th century money ethic, he has his exclusive standards of decency, honour, success. Morfin, the junior Manager, pays him the tribute of "high honour and integrity". But it never occurs to him to question the narrowness of these standards, their contracting effect on human sympathies, their erosion of human sensibilities. He sees nothing wrong in contracting a mercenary marriage like just another of his 'business' bargains, in callously manipulating human lives. The elder Carker and Walter Gay are indifferently victimised. His human relations are dehumanised by the formidable pressures of materialism. In fact,

Dickens is seen at his most mature in his socio-psychological handling of Dombey, in contrast to his conventional treatment of the idealised, oversimplified Florence.

In thus allowing public pressures and the failures of "private life to overrun his 'business' novel" and so deviating from his original plan of stressing the relationship between a businessman and his daughter, Dickens seems to intend a more complex vision of the precariously balanced public and personal lives of individuals exposed to the inhuman pressures of modern capitalism. Dombey's split consciousness of emotional deprivation and threatened business prestige is contained in his final acrimonious quarrel with his second wife. His persistent efforts at alienating Edith from Florence, and holding Florence hostage for Edith's good behaviour, suggest the human envy of an inadequate man.

"It is not the rule of my life to allow myself to be thwarted by anybody—anybody, Carker—or to suffer anybody to be paraded as a stronger motive for obedience in those who owes obedience to me than I am myself."<sup>15</sup>

His motives are jealously personal here. But his fears of public humiliation in the City are as intense.

"Good heaven, Mrs. Dombey!" said her husband, with supreme amazement, 'do you imagine it possible that I could ever listen to such a proposition? Do you know who I am, madam? Do you know what I represent? Did you ever hear of Dombey and Son? People to say that Mr. Dombey—Mr. Dombey! was separated from his wife! Common people to talk of Mr. Dombey and his domestic affairs! Do you seriously think, Mrs. Dombey that I would permit my name to be handed about in such connection.'<sup>16</sup>

This arrogant stance fails to suppress his growing sense of the powerlessness of material status. His perplexity and alarm at Paul's distrust of the money ethic changes to doubting uncertainty at Edith's contempt for wealth.

"She lifted her hand to the tiara of bright jewels radiant on her head, and plucking it off with a force that dragged and strained her rich black hair with heedless cruelty, and brought it tumbling on her shoulders, cast the gems upon the ground. From each arm she unclasped a diamond bracelet, flung it down, and trod upon the glittering heap. Without a word, without a shadow on the fire of her bright eye, without abatement of her awful smile, she looked on Mr. Dombey to the last, in moving to the door and left him."<sup>18</sup>

It is a self-redeeming act that frees her from the intolerable, though self-imposed degradation of a mercenary marriage [and leaves

Dombey unsure of his material values Carker's treacherous betrayal of the Dombeyan scale of values in the world of personal and business relations also irrevocably undermines Dombey's faith in the money ethic. The deceptiveness of 'honour', 'fear', 'admiration', 'power' and 'glory' is exposed. Broken by the financial collapse of '*Dombey and Son*', humiliated by his "domestic shame", he at last recognises "his false grounds of pride."<sup>19</sup>

Dickens' mature handling of the dehumanised Dombey's slow growth into moral and human sensitivity lends greater conviction to the novel than the contrived effects of Dombey's reformed rehabilitation. He is reduced to a state of maudlin sentimentality as a precondition of his reconciliation with Florence. This is artistically unconvincing as Julian Moynahan successfully establishes.

"Before his collapse Dombey inhabits a world of power, a world where hard, practical intelligence and will have run wild, issuing in spectacular inventions like the railroad in spectacularly predatory careers like Carker's. This is a tensely masculine world, a society of hearts without heads. Dickens' attempted solution of this cultural impasse merely perpetuates it. Dombey moves from hardness through debility to a maundering, guilt-ridden submission to feminine softness."<sup>20</sup>

Besides, Florence in her role of untainted, forgiving innocence, is not entirely credible. Her very perfection is suspect. Even the ups and downs of her romance with Walter Gay are invested with a fairy-tale aura and never develop into real tensions. Lacking in an intelligent, critical response to human relationships, she is merely baffled by her glimpses of human corruption in Mrs. Skewton, (Edith's mother), and Carker. She stands as her father's angelic saviour contending with 'a human soul', who is 'struggling to resist an overpowering call to be saved.'<sup>21</sup>

Set against this theme of unflawed childhood simplicity, the subtly motivated morally stained Dombey-Edith-Carker web of relationships have a permanent credibility, assume strikingly adult proportions. The oversimplifications of Dombey's purely structural evaluation become obvious.

"The marriage between Dombey and Edith which takes place exactly halfway through the book, comes to dominate it. This marriage is Dombey's nemesis and accomplishes his fall; it destroys the villain Carker, it drives Florence out of the Dombey house and makes possible her marriage to Walter. More emphatically than Dombey's relation with his daughter, it dramatizes the folly of allowing one's approach to the people around one to be controlled by the consciousness of one's wealth and grandeur."<sup>22</sup>

Dabney makes no reference to the violent emotional and moral tensions released by this marriage, nor to the powers of clinical self-criticism it rouses in Edith. She sets Florence as a new alter-ego to her flawed self, to her own warped childhood "taught to scheme and plot when children play"<sup>28</sup>, the perverting of her "natural heart" "to amuse the leisure of a world of mothers."<sup>24</sup>

"Oh mother, mother; if you had but left me to my natural heart when I too was a girl—a younger girl than Florence—how different I might have been."<sup>25</sup>

Her revulsion from her sordid youth exposed to the subtle manœuvrings of adult guile finds forceful expression in her direct confrontations with her mother,

"I was a woman—artful, designing, mercenary, laying snares for men—before I knew myself, or you, or even understood the base and wretched aim of every new display I learnt. You gave birth to a woman".<sup>26</sup>

She is fearful for Florence. She warns her mother against using the same base arts on Florence to defile her original virtue.

"Leave her alone. She shall not, while I can interpose, be tampered with and tainted by the lessons I have learnt"<sup>27</sup>

Florence's literary validity here as with Dombey, is therefore to be found only with reference to her impact on vibrant adult tensions. She exists for Edith, as an inviolable pure ideal in a world of moral ambiguities, and saves her tormented spirit from total despair. The mere fact of what she is, melts Edith's petrified human feelings. Florence's gentle touch

"was like the prophet's rod of old upon the rock. Her tears sprang forth beneath it, as she sank upon her knees and laid her aching head and streaming hair upon the pillow by its side."<sup>28</sup>

Edith's "woman's soul of love and tenderness" is poured out for Florence alone. Unsparring in her honesty, she admits her love for Florence as the only bond between herself and her estranged husband, a bond that Dombey had earlier denied in his denial of Florence's love. There is no hint of an inadequately motivated repentance in Dickens' portrayal of Edith, no hypocritical sympathy for the misfortunes of her husband. Incapable of self-excuses or self-reproaches for her compromising flight with the insidiously evil Carker, she retains her mature dignity to the very end and relentlessly discriminates between the 'dark vision' of an adult world of dehumanised egotism and the love and humanity embodied in Florence. There is no falsity in her recognition of her regard for Florence and Dombey's newly found love for Florence, as the only alleviating forces in her desolate future, helping her towards the generosity of

tolerance and forgiveness. Her positives are not facile. Nor are they suddenly and easily achieved. They bear the whole weight of the tortured realisation of a convulsed and agonised personality.

"When he loves his Florence most he will have me least. When he is most proud and happy in her and her children, he will be most repentant of his own part in the dark vision of our married life. At that time I will be repentant too—let him know it then—and think that when I thought so much of all the causes that had made me what I was, I needed to have allowed more for the causes that had made him what he was. I will try then to forgive him his share of blame. Let him try to forgive me mine."<sup>89</sup>

Such internal evidence of Dickens sensitive enactment of Edith's anguished moments of self-realisation is confirmed by comparison with Henry James' enactment of the subtlest nuances of Charlotte Verver's guiltridden soul in the "*The Golden Bowl*". Totally unlike in their motivations Edith and Charlotte share a passionate vitality and show a like degree of moral irresponsibility in their marriages of convenience. Their courses are different. Charlotte moves from a selfish amoral deviousness which sacrifices every human consideration to her 'grande passion' for the Prince, Maggie's husband and her own 'inamorata', towards a painfully slow moral awareness of her vile treachery. She and her lover employ the most subtle sophistry to justify their delicately insinuated adultery. Married to Maggie's father, she and the Prince describe themselves as outsiders in the mutually exclusive and tender father-daughter relationship. The moral ambiguity of the passionate kiss with which they seal the pledge of their loyalty and tenderness for the Ververs, is self-evident

"with a violence that had sighed itself the next moment to the longest and deepest of stillnesses, they passionately sealed their pledge "<sup>80</sup>

But Charlotte's superb poise gradually cracks under the pressure of Maggie's quiet knowledge of her guilt, and the growing sense of her monstrous disregard of her husband's decency and goodness. Just the slightest quaver in her voice betrays her inner turmoil in the final Gallery scene 'like the shriek of a soul in pain.' James *feels into* the situation and renders it in the nervously intense language of emotional involvement, already used by Dickens in Edith's repeated recoils from her self-debasement, 'A terrible tremble' creeps up Edith's 'whole frame' as she consents to her purchase by Dombey with the 'power of his money.'<sup>81</sup> She shrinks and slouches in utter shame as she takes the vengeful step of fleeing from the Dombey house to join Carker.

"Mamma!" said Florence.

'Don't call me by that name! Don't speak to me! Don't look at me!—Florence!' shrinking back as Florence moved a step towards her, 'don't touch me!'

As Florence stood transfixed before the haggard face and staring eyes, "she noted, as in a dream, that Edith spread her hands over them and shuddering through all her form, and crouching down against the wall crawled by her like some lower animal, sprang up, and fled away."<sup>32</sup>

The slinking 'animal' metaphor achieves a piled-up effect of disgust and revulsion. It also exposes by contrast Florence's passive bewilderment. She hovers helplessly and ineffectively on the periphery of adult confrontations and dichotomies unable to understand or to act. Her glimpse of Carker's stealthy departure from their house after his secret and fateful visit to Edith, makes her blood run cold, paralyses her physically and fills her with dread.

"She went quickly to her own room and locked her door; but even then, shut in with her dog beside her, felt a chill sensation of horror, as if there were danger brooding somewhere near her."<sup>33</sup>

This pitifully childish act of physically excluding a pervasive evil, is typical of Florence. It qualifies her claim to moral goodness and makes her less acceptable as a positive than the innocent but perceptive Maggie Verver in Henry James's "*The Golden Bowl*". The victim of unscrupulous schemers, Maggie struggles spiritedly to comprehend and master the evil they release. Her 'awfully quaint' moral fineness initiates itself into the knowledge of emotional ruthlessness, and confronts its diplomacy with the strength of her self-reliant will and her assured love for her husband and father. It enables her to act and restore complex human relationships, to the rounded perfection of

"the bowl with all our happiness in it. The bowl without the crack."<sup>34</sup> But not before she has suffered and been enriched by it. She gains a mature human insight unknown to Florence.

"Everything is terrible, cara—in the heart of man," she tells her husband. Florence's admonitions of repentance and forgiveness to the proud, unrepentant Edith, seem juvenile by comparison. For James in "*The Golden Bowl*" renders a completely adult world of sophistical thinking confounded by the morality of mature human insights. Dickens' rendering of the dehumanised adult milieu of *Dombey and Son*, compares favourably with 'James', but his portrayal of childhood positives is too facile to carry any moral weights, childhood values then merely function as foils in an ambivalent adult milieu in *Dombey and Son*. Even the idiom of their rendering is insipid by contrast. Besides, Paul and Florence suffer from a loss of individuality. They carry the overtones of Nell, Oliver and

David and are placed as typically Victorian in their suffering virtue. They are static.

"Things happen to Mr. Pecksniff, to Little Nell, to Mr. Micawber, to Mr. Dombey, to Bradley Headstone and Eugene Wraybourne, to Sally Brass and her brother: but *as the rule*, these things do not happen *within them*, as such things happen in the soul of any protagonists in a novel by Tolstoy or Dostoievsky, or as they are intended and traced as happening (say) in '*Romola*.' Dombey's conversion is a mere stage-trick, and for Micawber's apotheosis as a prosperous colonist, let him believe it who will."<sup>85</sup>

Edith Dombey, I feel, is an exception to this rule. Dickens draws her from the inside and enacts her savage struggle for moral and human identity in an ossified, amoral adult milieu, in trenchantly, incisive prose. There is no trace of the reiterative and stagey in the corrosive bitterness of

"There is no slave in a market, no horse in a fair, so shown and offered and examined and paraded, Mother, as I have been for ten shameful years."<sup>86</sup>

Nor is her contempt for her own involvement in a rapacious middle-class scale of values, less vitriolic in her confrontations with her mother:

"But my education was completed long ago. I am too old now, and have fallen too low, by degrees, to take a new course, and to stop yours and to help myself. The germ of all that purifies a woman's breast, and makes it true and good, has never stirred in mine, and I have nothing else to sustain me when I despise myself."

So as we are genteel and poor, I am content that we should be made rich by these means; all I can say is, I have kept the only purpose I have had the strength to form—I had almost said the power, with you at my side, Mother—and have not tempted this man on."<sup>87</sup>

There is a frantic urge to salvage the residue of her moral integrity even when she sells herself to the highest bidder in the marriage market, in disdainful deference to the pressures of her social milieu. Dabney ignores the very real force of these Regency pressures when he detects a note of 'falseness' in Edith's willingness to enter a marriage bargain she recognises as morally degrading. He cannot reconcile it with her

"will, passion, pride and analytical understanding of her position."<sup>88</sup>

Yet Trevelyan firmly establishes these pressures as a powerful social reality,

"For the yearly Victorian 'lady' and her mother of the Regency period, too often had nothing in the world to do but to be paid for and approved by man, and to realise the type of female perfection which the bread-winner of the family expected to find in his wife and daughters."<sup>89</sup>

It encages and constricts Edith driving her to the desperation of Carker's imprisoned parrot that

"twisted and pulled at the wires of its cage with its crooked beak and crawled up to the dome, and along its roof like a fly, and down again head foremost and shook and bit, and rattled at every slender bar."<sup>40</sup>

The artistic mastery of this pulsating parrot metaphor is only surpassed by Dickens' sardonic use of the phoenix metaphor in demolishing the septuagenarian Cleopatra's (Mrs. Skewton), incongruously facade,

"The maid who should have been a skeleton then re-appeared and giving one arm to her mistress, who appeared to have taken off her manner with her flannel gown, collected the ashes of Cleopatra and carried them away in the other, ready for tomorrow's revivification."<sup>41</sup>

In presenting this horrible, masquerade of pretense in Mrs. Skewton and of fawning parasitism in the bloated Major Bagstock, Dickens creates a rare piece of 'macabre grotesquerie'. The implications are plain of a milieu infected with "imbalances and perversions which disrupt the natural processes of human life and civilisation."<sup>42</sup>

Angus Wilson stresses its topical interest as a specific and "most frightening attack upon worldly values embodied in Regency manners."<sup>43</sup> But Dickens' caricature of monstrously deceitful self-interest travestying every decent feeling, has a much wider human relevance. It embodies a permanent onslaught on the fraudulent self-seeking egotism, the mental and moral deformity of a commercialised ethos. For grotesque caricature, as Barbara Hardy pertinently points out, is one of Dickens' chief means of depicting evil,

"which we can perhaps roughly but not too inaccurately describe as nature corrupted and deformed."<sup>44</sup>

Though Dickens successfully translates every single nuance of this moral chicanery into details of language, gesture and clothing *Dombey and Son* does not leave an overall impression of moral debility. The prevailing mood of nightmarish 'gloom and horror' undoubtedly gives the novel its colouring,<sup>45</sup> and accounts for the weirdly human animation of inanimate objects,

"candelabra, gnarled and inter-twisted, like the branches of trees, or horns of animals stuck out from the panels of the wall," in tune with the emotional contortions of Edith's attempted seduction. And horror, so intensely realised, is undisplaced by the tepid positive of the much-maligned virtue of love in Florence and such peripheral characters as Miss Tox, Polly Toodles, and John and Harriet Carker. Their immunity to every form of human cruelty, is too consistent to be credible. They have no hesitations, no moral confusions. Their notions of good and evil are

unbelievably simple. Their passive, will-less endurance is quite eclipsed by Edith's determined search for human values through a labyrinth of conflicting human motives. The recurring scenes of Florence and Miss Tox lost in the maze of London streets, have their symbolic relevance only in this context. Edith's disregard of conventional mores and moral definitions, makes her search strained and difficult. The expensive experiments of her marriage to Dombey and her flight with Carker teach her to discriminate between wrong and right for themselves, because, as Cousin Feenix says, it is wrong and not right, and not for extraneous considerations of family honour and fame. Her agonizingly painful progress through pride, resentment, hatred, self-flagellation, to a mature and human tolerance of emotional inadequacy in others, shares of the permanent human verities. This is not to deny Angus Wilson's fine perception of the innate goodness of Dickens' semi-idiots, Mr. Toots and Cousin Feenix.

"Mr. Toots and Cousin Feenix are a very important step forward in Dickens' embodiment in fiction of his belief in the greater importance of the heart than of the head. With them he succeeds entirely where Dostoevsky was less secure—in making us respect them for this, because their absurdity sets them off against the calculating mean society which the author is attacking."

But in Edith Dombey one senses the finer goodness achieved through disturbing adult experiences. This, if any, is the most convincing moral positive in Dickens' *Dombey and Son*, outweighing the simplified, sheltered moral absolutes stated in Florence. It is fully realised and is a decided advance on the stated ethics of Dickens' earlier novels. It is Dickens' first successful rendering of adult complexity.

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# A POST-COLONIAL PERSPECTIVE ON DICKENS AND SOCIETY

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SAJNI KRIPALANI

*La dame n'était pas seule  
Elle avait un mari  
Un mari tiès camme il faut  
Qui citait Racine et Corneille  
Et Voltaire et Rousseau  
Et le Père Hugo et le jenne Musset  
Et gide et Valéry  
Et tant d'autres encores.*

*René Despestre : Face à la Nuit*

The quotation from René Despestre's poem lends much point to Tanou's indictment of the need of the native intellectual to bind his intelligence as closely as possible to that of the colonising power. For those of us who *deal* in English literature in India, it forms part of a particularly uncomfortable chapter in "The Wretched of the Earth".<sup>1</sup>

Teaching Wordsworth's "Daffodils" *ad nauseam* to successive generations of unbelieving or too-much believing listeners is often so blatantly futile, that I, for one, always turn with tremendous relief to Dickens, for he, perhaps more than any nineteenth-century Englishman, actually practised in his writings, the dictum of "*Homo Sum : humani nihil a me alienum puto*".<sup>2</sup> Increasingly, I find that the resulting near-comprehensive sweep of his teeming urban canvas, presents situations, social attitudes and institutions which are as relevant to twentieth-century India as they were to Victorian England.

Humphrey House, that excellent *sociological* critic of Dickens, noticed this when he found himself teaching Dickens in India, and we can see ample evidence of it reading between the lines of his book. The connection is speedily established when we come across the background of squalid industrial slums and such sharply jolting observations as : 'There was an actual class war, but there was the possibility of cholera too'.<sup>3</sup> A cartoon of this, 'pestilence that walketh in darkness', in a more recent and profusely illustrated work,<sup>4</sup> there is frighteningly relevant, for instance, to Bengal in the summer months, even in the nineteen seventies.

In a casual essay called "Pardigglism" Verrier Elwin condemned the 'coolth' of

"organised charity, scrimped and iced,

In the name of a cautious, statistical Christ",

so prevalent in the west and with the anthropologist's intuitive perception pointed out how rapidly and dangerously it was catching on in India where it is sometimes incongruous.<sup>5</sup> I propose to make a case-study of attitudes to charity both in India and in England and examine the results of a set of attitudes or institutions transplanted from one soil to another.

I start with what must I think have been a typical nineteenth century attitude to the 'Poor' because it appears in "Chambers' Information for the People" for 1842 :

"In all stages of society there has existed a class, emphatically termed *the Poor*, composed of persons who, but for the charity of their neighbours, would be nearly or totally destitute, being themselves unable, or all but unable, to supply their own wants. It is easy to see how this has been and must be ; far from accidents in the operation of natural laws presiding over the birth of individuals, some come into the world without the usual gifts of body and mind required for obtaining a sufficient subsistence, the accidents of life deprive others of the use of their full powers ; many reach an infirm old age, without having laid up a store to help them over it ; the consequences of vice and error—of all these from which no one is altogether safe—leave many in a helpless state ; finally, in the imperfection of all political institutions, there are circumstances which press severely upon classes and persons, tending to make their own efforts for their subsistence insufficient. The operation of accidents upon one class of parents, and the vices and neglect of others, likewise leave many young and helpless children in a state in which they would be destitute but for the aid of neighbours. All of these causes being inherent in human nature and in society, we may be assured that 'the poor we shall have with us always', however it may be possible, by judicious and humane efforts, to keep their numbers within comparatively moderate bounds."<sup>6</sup>

The Biblical quotation, complacently corrupted and often cited out of context by budding Victorian Malthusians, is taken from the Gospel according to St. John, when Judas's objection to Mary's use of an expensive ointment to anoint His feet instead of giving the three hundred pence to the poor, is quickly over-ruled by Christ :

".....Let her alone : against the day of my burying hath she kept this : "For the poor always ye have with you ; but me ye have not always'" This corruption of the Bible was ubiquitous. Typically, Dickens, with

his flair for character, puts it into the mouth of that pig-headed pompous marine insurance-man John Podsnap who "was sensible of its being required of him to take Providence under his protection. Consequently he always knew exactly what Providence meant.....it was very remarkable (and must have been very comfortable) that what Providence meant, was invariably what Mr. Podsnap meant."<sup>8</sup>

A more analytical, less complacent viewpoint also existed and House quotes a piece from a contemporary (1845) article in the Westminster Review, mouthpiece of the Philosophical Radicals :

"*Charity*,—in various forms, in one or other of its multiplied disguises,—seems to be the only panacea which occurs to the Great ; especially the well-meaning Great of our metropolis. One party advocates a more liberal poor-law ; another, shorter hours of labour to be enforced by law. In the view of some, *allotments* are the one thing needful, while Young England suggests alms-giving in the magnificent and haughty style of the feudal ages ; and Lord Ashley commits his latest solecism, in getting up a society for the protection of Distressed Needlewoman. The same vulgar, shallow aristocratic error runs through all. Everyone thinks of *relieving*, no one of *removing*, the mischief. The prevailing idea...to give benefits to an inferior, not to do justice to a fellow man... we are weary of this cuckoo-cry—always charity, never justice ; always the open purse, never the equal measure."<sup>9</sup> One very much fears this was a voice in the wilderness.

Dickens did not merely abuse directly the practitioners of this brand of charity. He uses in his novels, the technique of the really effective cartoonist—that of the *caricature*, the charged or loaded portrait. The most lively of these portraits always combines a relaxed scrawl with the weapon of irony and leaves, like the best cartoons a lively impression on the mind of the reader.<sup>10</sup> Mrs. Pardiggle, for instance, who 'seemed to come into the room like cold weather', is described by Esther, with a few swift and devastating strokes : 'a formidable style of lady, with spectacles, a prominent nose, and a loud voice, who had the effect of wanting a great deal of room.' She always spoke 'in the same demonstrative, loud, hard tone, so her voice impressed my fancy as if it had a sort of spectacles on too—and I may take the opportunity of remarking that her spectacles were made the less engaging by her eyes being what Ada called 'choking eyes' meaning very prominent.'<sup>11</sup> Elsewhere, the irony is somewhat milder but equally effective, as with the Reverend Luke Honey thunder : as if the oxymoron in his name were not enough of a danger signal to arouse the reader's suspicion instantaneously, he writes some really pompous letters from his "Heaven of Philanthropy."<sup>12</sup> Sir Joseph

Bowley and his lady in the *The Chimes* and Mrs. Jellyby in *Bleak House* are others belonging to this populous tribe of violent philanthropists.

The portraits of their victims are unhappily, not equally effective, because they are also the victims of Dickens's *penchant* for sentimentality, and as a result they often lose the sympathy of the twentieth century reader. Betty Higden, for instance, 'with her bright eyes and her hopeful speech', starts out with a spirited resistance to the workhouse and all it stands for, but the tear jerker use of the Poorhouse idiom as her end approaches, smacks of melodrama that the sophisticated twentieth century reader cannot stomach :

"..... but she heard the tender river whispering to many like herself, 'Come to me, come to me ! when the cruel shame and terror you have so long fled from, most beset you, come to me. I am the Relieving Officer appointed by eternal ordinance to do my work; I am not held in estimation according as I shirk it. My breast is softer than the pauper-nurse's; death in my arms is peacefuller than among the pauper wards. Come to me !'"<sup>18</sup> though it would doubtless appeal to certain Hindi film-goers here. Among these victims is the brickmaker, recipient of Mrs. Paidiggle's most revolting brand of charity and he is rather more lively : 'I wants an end of these liberties took with my place.'

The genuine, non-egoistical benevolent who people Dickens's novels are even more uninspiring with the brothers Cheeryble (*Nicholas Nickleby*) or Mr. Brownlow (*Oliver Twist*), Dickens's cartoonist trick does not work because the 'good guy' cartoon must have a vitality of its own as in the Moomin or Peanuts type. Dickens's Victorian 'good guys', though benign, are equable, faceless and thoroughly dispensable.

Dickens's disgust for organised charity was only partial. A glance at his speeches will show that he was very much of his age, in that he actively supported fund-raising drives for a host of charities, believing that organised or institutional benevolence was all right if "discreet and impartial". In his views too, he contributed to the prejudices and prescriptions of his age and we would be mistaken if we looked for a really progressive force in Dickens. In an 1853 report on the activities of a "Home for Fallen Women" for instance, he says :

"When the House had been opened for some time, it was resolved to adopt a modification of Captain Macconnochie's mark system : so arranging the mark table as to render it difficult for a girl to lose marks under any one of its heads, without also losing under nearly all the others. The mark table is divided into the nine following heads. Truthfulness, Industry, Temper, Propriety of Conduct and Conversation, Temperance, Order, Punctuality, Economy, Cleanliness ... a girl declaring that

she wishes to leave, is not allowed to do so hastily, but is locked in a chamber by herself, to consider of it until next day ; when if she still persist, she is formally discharged.”<sup>14</sup> While we are with Tolstoi’s Anna, there is a willing suspension of any kind of moral judgement or sentiment on both the author’s part and the reader’s : Dickens contributed to both, hence the wooden and stagy quality of figures such as Martha ( David Copperfield ), Lelian ( The Chimes ) and Nancy ( Oliver Twist ).

It is possible to trace the history of the growth of institutional charity. In fact, the etymology of the word is in itself an indication of this history. From being the most noble of the abiding virtues, it already needed re-defining in the harsh medieval world, where the theoretical concept helped to some extent in melting down the barrier of hostility between the classes. Langland, the stern moralist attempted to re-establish the innocence of charity and its connection with love : Charity, said Amma to Long Will :

“...re chaffereth noughe, re challengeth, re craveth.  
As proude of a peny, as of a pound of golde,  
And is as gladde of a goune of a gray russet,  
As of a tunicle of tarse, or of trye scarlet.  
He is gladde with alle gladde, and good tyl alle wykked,  
And leueth and loueth alle that owre lorde made.”<sup>15</sup>

Both Langland and Chaucer establish a kind of mystique about the figure of the ploughman, who by the honesty of his labour has an intuitive perception of the truth and is, therefore, a specially endowed spiritual being.

Gradually, with the greater institutionalisation of the Church, and as the problem of the poor became larger than the parish could cope with, we notice that Charity was given a new official direction especially after the onslaught of Puritanism. Donne, at this point felt called up to issue a warning “Heaven is not to be had in exchange for a hospital or a chantry or a college erected in thy last will.”<sup>16</sup> By the end of that century the original concept of charity was totally unfashionable and it had taken on a frankly pragmatic and ‘secular’ tone, with an insurance premium quality about it : “discreet hospitality assists very much towards governing the nation, for the people are led by the mouth with moderate management, and without a little popularity they are perfect mules and ungovernable.”<sup>17</sup> The lady who said this was obviously a forerunner, though a rather frank one, of the rather self-centred Pardigglists who ran the various ladies’ charitable societies so scathingly caricatured in *Sketches by Boz*. Villainage had ceased, the middle classes had grown up

and developed a set of values that rated Humanitarianism of this obvious organised kind highly.

A different picture emerges in India. Not that charity does not exist. In fact a description of Bharat Varsha in the Vishnu Purana says "there also gifts are bestowed for the sake of the other world."<sup>18</sup> As early as the Vedic period *dana* and the merit of the giver are emphasised :

"May the splendour of the giver be foremost."<sup>19</sup> It was primarily a religious obligation, but self-conscious alms-giving from the well-to-do to the needy and the poor was not a part of Hinduism. A levelling occurred in that the Brahmin was the most legitimate recipient : "He who gives to a Brahmin a vessel filled with water for sipping will obtain after death, complete freedom from thirst."<sup>20</sup>

Along with this basic structure of charity prompted by religious duty was a rather disorganised indigenous humanitarianism, but the British type of fashionable, organised benevolence, which Dickens both condemned and subscribed to, superimposed itself on this basic structure after the colonising of India..

Starting somewhat earlier than 1947, but gaining much strength in the urban industrial centres after that, we have much more of this charity, 'rather in the Methodistical Order', as it were. Rather like the Parish do-gooders, women with some emotional void in their lives, or men with guilty consciences, dive into 'social work' with some zeal and a great deal of self-righteousness. The charitable efforts of the branches of the international 'service' organisations certainly belong in this category with their large formal banquets, balls, fun-fairs ( rather resembling church bazaars ) and accompanying press photographers. The Cultural Centres built by the richest business magnates also belong with this category that Donne warned against, or perhaps they feel like the twelfth century king of Kanauj that the occasional *tuladana* is called for. Only a mild case of paranoia, no doubt.

Here, as in Britain in the years of the growth of fashionable Benevolence, a new and rising middle class is growing up that has the time, energy and resources necessary for a certain amount of Pardiggism. The old caste system has given way to a new and in some sense more rigid one of gradations of status. The Veneerings of *Our Mutual Friend* would be the counterparts of the upper strata of Government employees on the one hand, and commercial executives and business men on the other. It is the wives of these men, who perform the chores of Pardiggism, with the occasional excursion from the opulence with which they are surrounded, to the world of the 'other half'—wearing elegant, if suitably muted clothes, and to them, very few brickmakers can say "I wants an

end of these liberties took with my place." Some of them 'operate' through the so-called 'international service' organisations and others through groups they have got up themselves. All of them, however, have attitudes towards slumdwellers, 'the Poor', Prostitution, which are Victorian in their limited range and complete lack of imagination. Here, too, the motive is to relieve, rather than remove the causes beneath, or to look into the future of the people being so relieved. In New Delhi, at the multi-storied building site for one of national-level American philanthropic organisations, a group of such elegant women has started a tiny school for the children of the labourers working at the site, using a tin-shed erected for the purpose by the contractors. The school will last as long as the construction of the building lasts, and after that what? Will society create a niche for these only slightly educated children as they grow up? Is it just or imaginative to raise their expectations from life at an impressionable age only to have them dashed down a few years later? One might well ask. Temporary justification, I can see, lies in the nourishing gruel and the glass of milk supplied by CARE and Brothers to India to each child, each day, and so far, certainly they appear to have a trusting attitude to their benefactors, but obsequy is there too, and that can be an ugly expression on the face of a child.

In a recent article, a historian, Nilmoni Mukherjee, has described the origin and working of a nineteenth century benevolent venture in mofussil Bengal : the Uttarpara Hitakari Sabha. The article opens, in fact, with the account of ladies charitable societies in *Sketches by Boz* cited earlier. The Sabha adapted itself to local problems such as that of women's education, but the type of group operating it at its inception further illustrates the fact that the inspiration of such philanthropy is not native, but foreign, and also indicates the social stratum of the organisers :

"By the middle of the nineteenth century there had emerged a class of Bengalis who had received varying degrees of western education and had developed a new set of values. Generally rooted in the soil, they enjoyed a secure income from land under the permanent settlement or supplemented it by following the learned professions or serving the Government and the mercantile houses. This class was growing politically conscious, but their political ideas had not yet crystallized. There were no political movements and organisations which they could join. So the numerous benevolent societies were the only places where they could be articulate.

It is, however, interesting to note that these kindly thoughts seldom extended to the ryots who lived and worked in wretched condition and who formed the bulk of the population. In this respect they behaved like

the early English humanitarians who found no inconsistency in helping the poor and at the same time exploiting the factory labourers".<sup>21</sup>

It is this dichotomy in attitude that, one fears, continues to operate in the minds of charitable persons even today, and in this field, certainly, Dickens indicates the danger that we are heirs to.

There are other institutions which Dickens illustrates prolifically which we would do well to try and understand because their resemblance to their Indian counterparts is so striking : Parliament, for instance, for which according to House, Dickens had such a 'contemptuous distaste'.<sup>22</sup> In Central Calcutta, there are dark, musty legal offices, where reading lamps burn by day and old men pour over dusty files throughout the day, which are Dickensian, if anything, and one might be pardoned for reacting a little like Lucie Monette when she first entered one in London. The Circumlocution Office also demands recognition here , another colonial legacy.

Dickens's own attitude to the colonies was a little like his own Major Bagshot's.<sup>23</sup> In one of his otherwise very attractive and moving speeches at a charitable dinner for the "Hospital for Sick Children" in 1858, he "gave the Army and Navy." He hoped, he said, it would not be incompatible with the latest fashion if he reminded the company that a large portion of the army were at this moment in India employed in punishing great treachery and great cruelty, and in upholding a government which, whatever its faults, had proved immeasurably superior to any "Asiatic rule."<sup>24</sup> Not, indeed, a man a great deal ahead of his times, but in spite of this, and perhaps in a sense, *because of it*, Dickens remains topical and illuminating for us.

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1. Franz Fanon . "The Wretched of the Earth" Penguin edition. The woman was not alone ; she had a very proper husband, who could recite Racine, "Corneille, Voltaire, Rousseau, Father Hugo, the young Musset, Gide, Valery and many and many others again."
2. "I am a man : nothing that is human can be alien to me." See Terence, "Heauton Timorumenos."
3. See House : "The Dickens World."
4. Angus Wilson : "The World of Charles Dickens."
5. Verrier Elwin : "Motley"
6. Chambers' information for the People, 1842, under the heading "Poor-Laws."
7. John XII 7-8.
8. Charles Dickens : "Our Mutual Friend."
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10. See E. H. Gombrich, 'The Cartoonists Armoury' in "Meditations on a Hobby horse."
11. Charles Dickens : "Bleak House."
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19. Rigveda, I. 13. 11.
20. Vasishtha Purana : xxix 17.
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# WORDSWORTH : A MAN SPEAKING TO MEN

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DIPENDU CHAKRABARTY

THE situation that makes Jean-Paul Sartre say 'We no longer know—literally—for whom to write' (*What is Literature?*) is probably more tormenting than the situation that made Wordsworth ask 'What is a Poet? To whom does he address himself?' But the difference is only between the degrees of intensity and complexity. The alienation of the writer from the people, which—particularly its Augustan manifestation—was a constant source of mental agony for Wordsworth has now assumed a proportion that is almost a threat to the very identity of a poet. In an age in which the poet himself is alienated from his poetry (for the man who suffers and the mind which creates are two separate entities), poetry is read and appreciated as a structure in terms of either musical notation or mathematical equation (for Pound 'a sort of inspired mathematics which gives us ..equations for human emotions'), and the reader is considered a necessary evil, we need badly someone like Wordsworth, who will remind us in plain words that the poet is a *man* (my italics), and that he is a man speaking to men.

This cannot be dismissed as a romantic obsession with the 'Poet' at the expense of his 'Poetry'. This states a truth which we can forget at our peril, and which, therefore, needs to be re-discovered from time to time, whenever a crisis, which is more than literary, confronts us. The Symbolists, the Dadaists, the Surrealists and those who share their views, have all made the poet in their different ways a nihilist in a world of nothingness. The modern formalists, the 'New Critics' and their followers have turned him into a watch-maker by cutting off the umbilical cord between him and his work, and placing all the emphasis on the highly complex mechanism of the art-object. Indeed, the de-humanisation of the poet has taken different forms at different periods. For Rimbaud the poet makes himself a 'voyant' by a 'long, immense, and planned disordering of all the senses.' For Mallarme the poet is a singer singing to himself, but then—ultimately—the song, not the singer is what really matters. For Eliot and most of the modern poets, the poet is not a 'personality' but a particular 'medium', a mask, a persona. Strangely

enough even in the under-developed societies like ours, where social alienation of the Western kind is, by and large, an imaginary experience, poets have surrendered themselves to a similar view of the poetic personality.

At a time like ours we must remember, as Wordsworth did, that the poet is also a man, not merely because he has a personality, but because his experience, religious, political and aesthetic, is not essentially different from that of the man to whom he is communicating it. Wordsworth kept this in mind when he said that the poet is not different 'in kind from other men, but only in degree.' For ages the poet has been looked upon either as a saint or an unconscious dreamer, or an automaton, and in each case he has been de-humanised, and has suffered a disintegration of his personality as a man. In the modern age, his estrangement from the society has ultimately led to his estrangement from his own work. This duality of alienation—social and aesthetic—which is more acutely felt now than ever before is generally mistaken for an essential condition for artistic creation. The modern poet, living as he does in a non-man's land between the bourgeois philistines and the vulgar masses, has no alternative but to escape into the warm cocoon of his ego. The remnants of the idealistic tradition, still preserved by such concepts as Beauty, Eternity, Being, etc. have made him see his isolation as something unique and not as an inevitable result of the industrial class society.

Not that Wordsworth understood what man had made of man in terms of socio-economic causality. He only recognised the social nature of alienation, though he could not—and it was not possible for him, either—discover its root. His philosophy was as idealistic as that of any other romantic before or since. Even his views of poetry, which never coalesced into a system, had an idealistic veneer. But more than any other romantic, he was keenly aware of a hiatus between the two poles of communication, the poet and his audience. Coleridge had no patience for this vulgar pose of the poet who was to write 'the first genuine philosophic poem'. Lacking the philosophical apparatus of Coleridge, Wordsworth could only raise certain questions, and hardly took the trouble to pursue them in the way he was expected to do. But some of the questions he raised still have their relevance for our age; the most important of them is 'To whom does the poet address himself?'. This is a question which was cynically ignored by most of his contemporaries and his successors. But it keeps popping up sometimes, and the writer, unable to answer it, is perplexed. The XXVIII Congress of International P.E.N. devoting itself to a discussion of this question, fell into this perplexity. Wordsworth's definition of the poet as a man speaking to

men is only a bold attempt to restore between the poet and his audience the link that was severed by the so-called elite, 'people of consideration in society' in the 18th century.

The statement that the poet is a man speaking to men does not of course give us the whole image of him ; it leaves out much, but it does certainly point to something which other definitions have overlooked ; it is that by writing poetry the poet enters into a peculiar kind of relationship with others. To be a poet is to establish a new kind of contact with society through a new medium, i.e. language. In short, poetry is a peculiar kind of social communication. This seems to be what Wordsworth had in mind, and the point he made cannot be understood apart from the 18-century context in which he had to write. If he had failed to convince Coleridge or if we to-day find in his preface a confusion of critical standards, it is because he was not—nor did he wish to be one—much of a theorist. In a letter to J. A. Herand, he wrote, "I heartily regret I ever had anything to do with it [the Preface]". But that did not prevent him from seeing the fundamental problems of poetry in proper perspective : the poet as a man, the language he uses, the man he addresses. Strangely enough, what he said about them has often been repeated, though without acknowledgement, by many modern poets and critics.

Nobody today will speak slightlying, as Coleridge did, of Wordsworth's attempt to write in a 'language really spoken by men'. If the poet-reader relationship is a human one, communication is possible only through the living speech of the day. T. S. Eliot says in '*The Social Function of Poetry*' that emotion and feeling are "best expressed in the common language of the people—that is, in the language common to all classes : the structure, the rhythm, the sound, the idiom of a language, express the personality of the people which speaks it." Wordsworth's fault was his frankness ; he clearly pointed to the social classes : 'a selection of language really used by men' meant for him 'the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society.' This statement seems to be less vague than Eliot's 'language common to all classes.' It shows that more than any other romantic Wordsworth was aware of the kind of people he wrote for. It is amusing to note that this man, who could not forget the presence of the audience, was accused of 'egotism' by Keats, the poet who cared very little for the man on the other side of the art-object.

Wordsworth's dictum does not mean that poetry should be written in rustic dialects ; it only asks the poet to recapture the vitality and the freshness of the language of the villagers. The reaction of Coleridge, for whom the religious education of the rustics was more important than

their experience, was that of a typical metaphysician. Probably Synge, who cared so much for the 'idiom of the Irish-thinking people' could understand better what Wordsworth meant. The manifesto of the Imagists (1915) aimed at doing the same thing—to use the language of common speech.

Those who have taken Wordsworth's words literally have failed to see that he did not identify the language of poetry with the language of the common people at all points. What is important is that the former's strength and life come from the latter. Since the language is the medium through which the poet is linked with his audience, the language has to be his own, without being radically different from that of the audience. For the poet has two kinds of commitment—to the language and to the people. Wordsworth surely did not state all this categorically, but his definition of the poet leads us to this conclusion. Although Wordsworth's theory and poetry, precept and practice, do not compose an organic whole his personal failure does not invalidate his theory of communication. For us, his deviation is less important than the truth we find in his views. J. K. Stephen heard two voices of Wordsworth; perhaps, there are more than two. Whatever the number of voices we detect in Wordsworth's poetry, none of them denies the presence of the man who overhears. He was aware of the fact that even when the poet is talking to himself, he needs a listener, a fact which has been denied by T. S. Eliot in his essay '*Three Voices of Poetry*'. Eliot has overlooked the fact that the poet is never alone, and that even in his soliloquies he assumes that somebody is overhearing him, just as an actor on the stage knows that his 'asides' and 'soliloquies' are meant for the audience. The Shavian character, who says that the poet talks to himself while others overhear him, will be nearer the truth if he only adds that the poet himself is aware of those who overhear.

When Wordsworth says that the poet gives us pleasure not as 'a lawyer, a physician, a mariner, an astronomer, or a natural philosopher, but as a Man' he seems to imply that the poet alone can be the 'whole man,' undisturbed by the division of labour in what is known to-day as the 'bourgeois' society. To the modern poet, who lives in a technologically advanced class society, and like all other individuals, suffers the pangs of alienation, this may appear as a romantic idealization. But he, too, feels the need of restoring the 'wholeness' of the man; but it is always a personal need for him, rarely a communal one. As a result, the modern poets write for poets or academicians, but, 'Poets do not write for Poets alone, but for men.' Wordsworth wrote for men.

No book on modern poetry can begin without calling attention to the

progressive shrinking of its audience. Anthony Thwaite observes, 'As a student audience for poetry has grown, a lay audience has largely vanished' (*Contemporary English Poetry*). 'Without a public', says F. R. Leavis, 'poetry can hardly survive and the ordinary cultivated reader is ceasing to read poetry at all'. Even T. S. Eliot who wanted to rely on an elite said, 'when a civilization is healthy, the great poet will have something to say to his fellow countrymen at every level of education' (*The Social Function of Poetry*). And Sartre says, 'We have reader—but no public'.

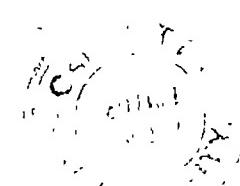
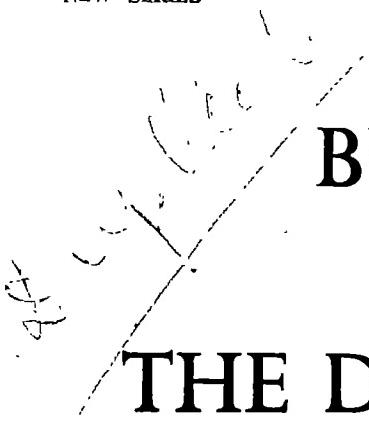
At this point it will be interesting to describe the origin and the character of what is known as the public (Sartre's meaning is different). In the field of literature the middle-class 'public' which is determined by its purchasing capacity and best described as literary consumers is largely shaped by the publisher who acts like a middle-man between the poet and the reader. And the publisher has to compete with the owners of other mass media such as TV, film, gramophone etc. The mind of the public is conditioned by the existing production relations. Under the circumstances, the public whose taste is created by the socio-economic forces beyond their control, seem to be hardly sympathetic to the artist. The situation, in which a best-seller is always a 'masterpiece' and the value of a work of art is not more than its value as a commodity in the market, is hardly an ideal situation for the creative artist. Indeed, the philistinism of the middle-class 'public' is something one cannot get away from. This made T. S. Eliot wish to write for 'an audience which could neither read nor write' (*The Use of Poetry and the Use of criticism*). Wordsworth, too wanted to write for an audience which could neither read nor write, i. e., the 'lower classes of society.' But his performance taught him that it was not possible for a man of his class to write for them. This is again the feeling of Sartre, and since he seriously thinks of a way out of this impasse, in his book '*What is Literature?*' He comes to the conclusion that 'the fate of literature is bound up with that of the working class'. What Sartre suggests may not be accepted by all, but everyone feels to-day that a new society is badly needed for the restoration of the bond between the poet and the people. And Wordsworth seems to have been the first poet to look upon it as a problem which cries for solution. However idealistic his distinction between the People and the Public (The Essay Supplementary to the Preface) may be.

Now, Wordsworth, it is true, did not see the problem of alienation as a social phenomenon beyond the control of the individual poet. There lies his idealistic attitude to the social evolution. His peasants and shepherds are in most cases poetic idealizations. For a Marxist, there is not much of a difference between the common reader of Johnson and

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## CONTENTS

---

SHAKESPEARE ON THE STAGE IN CALCUTTA .....	1
K. Lahiri	
CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE AND THE MODERN READER .....	7
S. K. Das	
GEORGE MEREDITH'S HANDLING OF TIME* .....	15
Amitabha Sinha	
GEORGE BERNARD SHAW: A REVIEW .....	41
Bishnupada Bera	
BROWNINGIANA (Notes on Some Browning Poems) .....	55
Amalendu Bose	

## OUR CONTRIBUTORS

**KRISHNACHANDRA LAHIRI:** Reader in the postgraduate department of English, Calcutta University, is a frequent contributor to this Bulletin.

**SISIR KUMAR DAS:** After doing his M. A. from Calcutta spent a year in the University of Exeter, taking a diploma in English Studies ; he has done a doctoral work on Wordsworth's Concept of Imagination and has recently joined the department of English.

**AMITABHA SINHA** M.A., D.Phil. (Cal.) is a Lecturer in English, Kalyani University ; his thesis was on George Meredith's novelistic technique.

**BISHNUPADA BERA** M.A. D.Phil. (Cal.), Principal of Mahishadal Raj College (District, Midnapore), worked on the impact of Ibsen on Sir Arthur Pinero, Henry Arthur Jones and Bernard Shaw.

**AMALENDU BOSE** is Professor of English in the department of English, Calcutta University.

# SHAKESPEARE ON THE STAGE IN CALCUTTA

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K. LAHIRI

How prophetically did Shakespeare speak through Cassius :

'How many ages hence  
Shall this our lofty scene be acted over,  
In states unborn, and accents yet unknown.'

( *Julius Caesar* : III, i, 117-119 )

In fulfilment of the prophecy the scenes of Shakespeare's dramas are being acted in remote India after centuries and even in alien languages.

The earliest performances of Shakespeare's dramas in the play-houses in Calcutta may be traced to the second half of the eighteenth century. By available evidences Shakespeare first appeared on Calcutta stages in 1778. That year a number of civilians of the East India Company staged *Julius Caesar* on an improvised stage in Calcutta. This was the first recorded performance of a Shakespeare drama in Eastern India. Other early performances were those of *Hamlet* on April 13, 1784, of *The Merchant of Venice* on October 21, 1784, and of *Richard III* on January 31, 1788.

These occasional performances organized by the European residents in the second half of the eighteenth century led to a revival of interest in the theatre among Indians in the following century. Under the patronage of the aristocratic section of the Bengalee society local talents began to present performances in theatre houses which were not at all developed technically nor fully commercialized as yet. Among the first dramas chosen for such semi-public performances under private patronage were some Shakespeare plays, mostly *Julius Caesar*, *Othello*, and *The Merchant of Venice*.

In 1831 at the Hindu Theatre in Calcutta the performance of Shakespeare drama started with the staging of a portion of *Julius Caesar*. 'The first performance of a complete play of Shakespeare took place at an educational institution when in 1853 the David Hare Academy presented *The Merchant of Venice* with conspicuous success.' Next year on Wednesday, May 3, *Julius Caesar* was staged at the house of Peary Mohan Bose at Jorasanko, and highly appreciated by the elite of the city. Thus

gradually Shakespeare's plays were produced for a wide audience in the latter part of the nineteenth century.

The tradition of staging Shakespeare drama in Calcutta did not die out with the coming of the twentieth century. After a brief and temporary vogue of performance by professional artists on the public stage, it returned to the academic institutions from where it had originally started. Still the commercial theatre houses made a few belated attempts to keep on the tradition. Giris Chandra Ghosh, the doyen of the Bengali theatre, staged his own Bengali version of *Macbeth* in his theatre house. In recent times there have again been attempts at Shakespeare revival on the stage by amateurs from the academic world. Students and teachers from Colleges and Universities have, in collaboration, presented many creditable performances of Shakespeare plays. One such was that of *Macbeth* at Shakespeare Birth Anniversary in 1954 by College professors under the auspices of the Shakespeare Society in Bengal. In the quater centenary year the Calcutta Central Celebration Committee at Mohajati Sadan, Cultural associations like the Calcutta University Institute and Prachya Vāni, and the universities have contributed to the performances of Shakespeare's plays both in the original and in translations.

Such stagings have been undertaken both within the campus of educational institutions and at public places outside. Student unions, town clubs, and other bodies have also presented Shakespeare plays, the performances being organized by local talents drawn largely from the academic world. Public performances, however, have come from both professionals and amateurs.

In the early period of Shakespeare staging in India valuable 'work was done by English educationists in India, who arranged the production of Shakespearean and other plays, and arranged for English actors to help with co-acting'. Throughout the nineteenth century the student community showed a great eagerness to perform Shakespeare plays. Even after the introduction of Bengali versions of Shakespeare's plays on Bengal's professional stage, Shakespeare's original plays in English continued to be performed by students in educational institutions.

Also the idea that detached portions from Shakespeare's dramas may provide enjoyment to the audience occurred first not to the commercial theatre directors but to the pioneers in the academic world. In the second quarter of the nineteenth century *Macbeth* was a popular play in Calcutta schools and colleges, and students often staged selected scenes from it at annual functions.

We get accounts of performances of Shakespeare plays and scenes at educational institutions in contemporary periodicals. *Samachar Darpan*

of February 19, 1831, published a report on the staging of Act III, Scene i of *The Merchant of Venice* by the students of the Hindu College. The same paper of a later date reported a similar performance by those students at the Government House in Calcutta. Here also not the entire drama but only the Trial Scene (Act IV, Scene i) was staged.

We have also records of the stagings of Shakespeare's plays in the Metropolitan Institution and in the David Hare Academy. In 1853 there were two performances of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in the David Hare Academy. Mr. Clinger, Head of the English Department of the Calcutta Madrasa, coached the students in the acting. Several Englishmen helped also in setting up the stage. About six to seven hundred natives and Europeans came to see the performance and highly praised the acting of the students. *The Bengal Harkara* dated February 15, 1853, commented on the annual function of the David Hare Academy thus : 'Instead of customary display of pyrotechnics, the pupils have resolved to celebrate the examination by enacting at the school premises scenes from *The Merchant of Venice*'. This was the first performance of a whole Shakespeare play by students. Other contemporary papers also praised highly the quality of the acting.

Inspired by the performance of the David Hare Academy, the old and present students of the Oriental Seminary proceeded to stage Shakespeare plays. The stage set up in that school came to be known as the Oriental Theatre. Acting was taught by Mr. Clinger and later by an English lady Clara Ellis. Here the students staged *Othello* on September 26 and October 5 in 1853, *The Merchant of Venice* on March 2 and 17 in 1854, and *Henry IV, Part I* on February 15 in 1855.

Among non-professional performances of Shakespeare plays those undertaken in different colleges deserve a special survey. As Shakespeare's dramas are always included in the undergraduate syllabus, students have shown a natural eagerness to stage Shakespeare plays. At St. Xavier's and many other colleges some of Shakespeare's dramas have been regularly staged, and on seeing these performances not only the teachers and students themselves but many outsiders have derived much pleasure. There has been also a laudable tradition of Shakespeare staging at the Calcutta University Institute. Till quite recently Shakespeare plays used to be performed here in original English. Of late there are seen sporadic attempts at staging Bengali translations of Shakespearean dramas with a sort of amused interest. Similarly, in the early period of the evolution of the public theatre in Bengal though Bengali versions of Shakespeare's plays were performed for a pretty long time, those have not been successful

commercially. This early failure gradually made the managers of professional stages drop Shakespeare plays from their programme.

The houses where Shakespeare plays were performed come under two categories, namely, those under European supervision and participation, and others under Indian management. Among the places where Shakespeare plays were acted by Englishmen living in this country during the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries were The Play House in Lall Bazar Street (1755-59), The Calcutta Theatre or The New Play House in Theatres Street (1776), Mrs. Bristo's Theatre (1789), The Chowringhee Theatre in Theatre Road (1813-39), and Sans Souci Theatres (1839-49).

Later Shakespeare plays in original English were staged by Bengalee actors in theatre houses founded by Bengalees. This was pioneered by Prasanna Coomar Tagore in his Hindoo Theatre, the first Bengalee directed stage. In *Samachar Darpan* of December 17, 1831, there appeared a circular of a performance of a portion of *Julius Caesar* to be held at the Hindoo Theatre.

Similarly, actors appearing in Shakespeare plays have been both Europeans and Indians. Touring actors from Shakespeare's own country presented his plays in Indian cities during the British regime and afterwards. The early history of Shakespearean performances in India is linked with the outstanding figure of David Garrick, who not only acted a wide range of Shakespearean parts, but produced versions of the plays nearer to the originals than those previously current, and promoted the Shakespeare Jubilee of 1769. He had associations with the East India Company and was appealed to in 1774 to assist the residents of Calcutta, where theatrical performances had been given before 1757, with productions. He sent out a youngman with scripts of plays and scenery, and *Richard III* and *Hamlet* were staged.

Even after original Bengali dramas had been in full swing on the commercial stage here many theatrical parties from abroad came to this country and gave exhibition performances of Shakespeare plays. On witnessing their histrionic art, the actors in our country received inspiration and lessons on direction, choreography, and stage decoration.

The famous English actor Matheson Lang, who won reputation in different roles of Shakespeare's characters, came to Calcutta and appeared in public performances. Sisir Bhaduri, the illustrious Bengali actor, was influenced by his highly individualistic style of acting and interpretation of Shakespeare's characters. Recently English actors and parties have visited Indian cities like Calcutta, Delhi, Madras, Bangalore, Bombay and gave performances in places like the St. Xavier's College and the

British Council. The New Shakespeare Company led by Mr. Conville came in 1964-65. At the British Council there have been regular programmes of Shakespeare's recorded plays, Elizabethan music, as also scheduled play-readings.

Among Indian actors in Shakespeare plays there have been both amateurs and professionals. In the staging of a scene from *The Merchant of Venice* by the students of the Hindu College in February, 1831, the parts of Solanio and Tubal were respectively taken by Kailas Chunder Dutt of Rambagan and Ramgopal Ghosh, who was to be one of the leaders of the Renaissance in Bengal. Their performance was reported favourably by *Samachar Darpan*. • The same paper on March 12, 1834, again praised the acting of Iswar Chandra Ghosal and Madhusudan Dutt in the roles of Henry the Sixth and Gloster respectively in the annual function of the same institution at the Town Hall. For performing the complete part of a Shakespeare character the name of Baisnab Charan Addya remains inscribed in letters of gold in the annals of Shakespeare staging in India for his pioneering venture. When on August 17, 1848, and on a subsequent date *Othello* was performed in the European theatre, Sans Souci, with an all-English cast, the role of the Moor was assigned to this Bengalee youth, and his rendering of the hero's character received universal acclaim.

At the Oriental Theatre of the Oriental Seminary in performances of *Othello* in 1853, of *The Merchant of Venice* in 1854, and of *Henry IV* in 1855 Bengalee young men appeared in the roles of both male and female characters. Priyanath Dutt distinguished himself as Iago, Shylock, and Falstaff; Radhaprosad Basak figured prominently in the roles of Emilia and Portia. In a performance of *Macbeth* in 1900 at the Calcutta University Institute Jnanendra Basu appeared as Macbeth and Kiron Dutt as Macduff with remarkable success. In our times Utpal Dutt, a Xaverian, has been a highly successful interpreter of Shakespeare's tragic heroes on the stage.

As to the nature and quality of Shakespeare acting in this country a distinct tradition has grown steadily. At the earliest stage, in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, both in Calcutta and in Bombay British amateur acting developed. Performances were intended primarily for the recreation of the European residents. Practically no account of the histrionic skill of these early Shakespeare actors has been recorded and preserved.

In the nineteenth century when Shakespeare acting passed on to the Indians, the quality of performance attained a remarkably high level of excellence. 'It can be seen from newspaper reports of the time

that the histrionic talent displayed by the actors and their perspective interpretation of the Shakespeare characters represented by them surprised and delighted even members of the European community.'

In the present century an increasingly large section of intelligent people, including college and university teachers, are participating in amateur Shakespeare acting, and the appreciation of Shakespeare on the stage is becoming more and more sophisticated. The tendency is towards outgrowing the old declamatory stage tradition of the last century and attaining a subtler and richer interpretative presentation of Shakespeare's characters.

# CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE AND THE MODERN READER

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S. K. DAS

SINCE the beginning of this century Marlowe's life and works have been thoroughly investigated and today we know more about him than about most Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists. Several significant events in which he took part, his beliefs, the circumstances of his death, and various other facts concerning him have been unearthed by F. S. Boas, J. L. Hotson, A. L. Rowse, John Bakeless, Charles Norman and S. A. Tannenbaum.<sup>1</sup> The record of his life though necessarily far from complete, is very much fuller than it was a generation ago. We know for instance that his father belonged to the guild of shoemakers, that Marlowe himself was involved in espionage, that he held irreligious opinions and that he died in a tavern kept by the widow Eleanor Bull. Some of the most careful students of his work have even no doubts about the possibility of knowing what Marlowe really thought.<sup>2</sup> These investigations, it may be said with some degree of certainty, are not yet over ; but the more important terrains have been explored and the latest findings confirm impressions which have come down to us through rumour and surmise. Even where we have no exact knowledge, such accounts as we possess today are both fascinating and intriguing. The materials in our hands are, in any case, much fuller and more authentic than those we have about the greatest playwright of the Elizabethan age. Today he is generally regarded as one of the most eloquent spokesmen in England for the complex of attitudes and the sequence of undertakings that we conveniently term Renaissance. This remains largely true inspite of Douglas Bush's assertion that he is less representative of the Elizabethan Renaissance than is, for example, Hooker.<sup>3</sup>

The predominantly Renaissance elements of Marlowe's plays need not, however, obscure the values that Marlowe has for the modern man. At least one question still remains for the modern reader to answer for himself. Do the plays of Marlowe have any significance for the modern man ? Should he be still regarded as a 'pre-Shakespearean primitive' ? Or should he be dismissed as a 'blank verse beast' ? Critics tell us that all great poetry must possess the virtue of modernity and if we call

Marlowe a great poet we must necessarily accept him as a modern poet. But the dialectic may not satisfy one whose idea of modernity in literature is based on the substance of contemporary literature and a sensitive awareness of contemporary civilisation. One would still ask if the poet of the English Renaissance speaks for the modern man. For after we have been made to acknowledge his greatness as a poet, it would be a gain if we realise that his words have a meaning for us today. No true appreciation of art is possible unless our appreciation is permeated by a deep consciousness of our own time.

Tragedy depends upon ethical and metaphysical assumptions which the dramatist must invite his audience to share with him. Perhaps more than any of his contemporaries Marlowe mirrored in his plays his own changing vision of man's place in the universe. There is in all his plays an emphasis upon the limitless potentialities of mankind (*Dido, Tamburlaine, I*), and a sense of human limitation and defeat that Ellis-Fermor calls the mood of spiritual despair. These two polar opposites clash in his plays. It is in this sense that Marlowe may be said to be more of a modernist than most moderns. He is the soul nearest ours ; Swinburne's view is also ours. Do we not find in him the prognosis of modern disquietude in the 'spiritual elephantiasis' of Marlowe's heroes ? Tamburlaine is symptomatic of the beginning of man's quest for power and never before was it a more open and professed creed that it is today. Like Tamburlaine nearly all of Marlowe's protagonists are 'overreachers'. Their ethos is living dangerously between the alternatives of aspiration and sedition. To them there is but one absolute measure of all phenomena : the human will. The Duke of Guise is the chief exponent of such a belief :

That like I best, that flies beyond my reach.  
Set me to scale the high Pyramids,  
And thereon set the diadem of France ;  
I'll either rend it with my nails to naught,  
Or mount the top with my aspiring wings,  
Although my downfall be the deepest hell.

This is the quintessence of the Marlovian tragedy. The overreaching image sums up the whole predicament of modern life. Hence Marlowe's protagonist is rarely the Everyman ; he is more often the exceptional man who becomes the king because he is a great warrior or hero. This comes very close to the 'hubris' of the Greek tragedy, that arrogance of heroes which fatally provokes the anger of the gods. 'Pride goeth before a fall'—the proverbial formula for tragic irony seems to hold good regardless of changing epochs. The evidence for Marlowe's direct study

of Machiavelli seems to me inadequate but there is certainly the presence of a Machiavellian insight into the conditions in which an ambitious person may be expected to arise.<sup>4</sup> Marlowe stressed, extolled and expounded throughout his career that Machiavellian virtue of virtues—‘virtu’ which has been translated in the modern language as ‘initiative’, ‘self-reliance’, or ‘rugged individualism’. St. John had preached : “For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.” (*Epistle of John*, II, 16). But these are the leading motives of the humanistic drama ; and we have in Marlowe’s works a positive affirmation of the strongest drives—the appetite for sensation, power and knowledge—that animated and thrilled the Renaissance imagination and that have shaped so much of our modern outlook. He has only pushed them to their farthest limits which arouse in us mixed feelings of exhilaration and temerity. Tamburlaine’s arrogant claim is :

I hold the Fates bound fast in iron chains,  
And with my hand turn Fortune’s wheel about,  
And sooner shall the sun fall from his sphere  
Than Tamburlaine be slain or overcome.

To watch his progress is like watching the *Mirror for Magistrates* come to life. Marlowe’s hero seeks at length to storm the gates of heaven. It is then that

Murderous Fates throw all his triumph down.

Tamburlaine has sought an earthly crown ; and an earthly crown is the notorious emblem of worldliness and pride of life. In Shakespeare’s play *Macbeth* we reach the terminal point of a sequence of explorative thought of which *Tamburlaine* is the beginning.<sup>5</sup> For Tamburlaine

A God is not so glorious as a king.

This is not just bathos but blasphemy. Tamburlaine is *libido dominandi*, boundless ambition, *amour de l'impossible* in its grossly materialistic aspect. His love for Zenocrate is a force that modifies his, ambition and results only in a temporary pause in his career of conquest and aggression : ‘Tamburlaine takes truce with all the world (V. ii 467)’<sup>6</sup> He is the exponent of a new age and his arrogant claims reinforced by the characteristic images—Titans, Phaeton, Croeton and Lucifer—demonstrate his ethos

At the beginning of the second part, however, the self-proclaimed god is no more than a mortal ; his strength is his inhumanity and his weakness is in his mortality : ‘Tamburlaine, the scourge of God, must die’. Tamburlaine’s self-discovery must take him as far as death before he finds the limits set to his ambition. M. M. Mahood, therefore, describes *Tamburlaine* as “the only drama I know in which the *death* of the hero

constitutes the tragedy."<sup>7</sup> The great tragic heroes of Shakespeare experience the tragedy while they remain alive ; Tamburlaine must die in order to realise the tragic predicament of life. Consequently Marlowe's play suggests the rediscovery of one of the elementary laws of human existence : its subjection to time. Arnold Toynbee has introduced Timur's accomplishment as a supreme example of the suicidalness of militarism. It is a sobering comment on our age, if not on Marlowe's tragedy. It symbolises the attitude of those whose lust for power impels them to elevate the means to get what they want into the only principle to which they are willing to ascribe any validity. The play is a parable of modern megalomania. The revival of *Tamburlaine* in more recent times having been dropped out of the repertory for more than hundred years has been justly greeted as peculiarly meaningful and appropriate.

Like Tamburlaine Marlowe's Jew is 'framed of finer mould' than common men. The articles of his belief have been bluntly set forth in the wellknown prologue, and the fundamental premise of egoism is stated very precisely :

I count Religion but a childish toy.

Polysyllables in Marlowe are generally regarded as a means of aggrandisement ; the monosyllabic 'toy' is the ultimate in belittlement. 'Policy' is the shibboleth of political realism of today, as it was with the Jew and the Christians of Marlowe's play.

Who is honour'd now but for his wealth ?

asks the Jew He speaks not so much for his race and for his epoch as for us. Gold to him, as the crown was to Tamburlaine, the highest 'felicity' ; and he completes the blasphemy by marking his buried treasure with the sign of the Cross. This makes him far from being quite an alien in the shabbily commercial world of today which considers wealth as the supreme felicity. Marlowe's Jew sublimates this shabby ideal—'infinite riches in a little room'—from the sordid plane of economics to that of aesthetics. We have been told by Ruskin that a miser cannot sing about his gold ; but this is what the Jew precisely does. James Russell Lowell describes it as the very "poetry of avarice." The Jew says to the Merchant :

What more may heaven do for earthly man  
Than thus to pour out plenty in their laps,  
Ripping the bowels of the earth for them,  
Making the seas their servants and the winds  
To drive their substance with successful blasts ?

Here is the subversion of values that exalts to the skies the God of Hades and of the riches likewise. This is a final commentary upon an

ethos, not so much Jewish as modern, turned upside down. We are the 'worldlings' to whom he addresses. In the scene with Friar Bernardine and Friar Jacomo the Jew is content to remind them with deplorable callousness that the violation of the Seventh Commandment is not to be taken as seriously as the Sixth. It is, therefore, appropriate that he expires in the steaming cauldron. *The Jew of Malta* is not the 'farce' which T. S. Eliot calls it; it is a proper tragedy because it portrays the degeneration of man reacting to evil.

With Gaveston Marlowe goes beyond Tamburlaine and Barabas in recording a new and dangerous way to power. The Machiavellian has become an Epicurean now; and his mode of seduction is poetry, music and sensual delights. Edward is born into a position, in which to survive he must be a Machiavellian superman like Tamburlaine or Mortimer; and since he is not, he is destroyed. That is his tragedy. But the tragedy of Mortimer is that he is destroyed by being precisely what Edward is not. Mortimer is punished for his sin and it is the inevitable fate of all who aspire beyond the limits of mortality. Edward is a king with the soul of an actor as much as Tamburlaine was an actor with the soul of a king. So Edward has to pay the most ironic penalties for the 'frolicking prodigalities' of his kingship. Mortimer stands as 'Jove's huge tree' the Olympian oak, to whom others are but shrubs. He has even viewed himself, in his heyday, rather as Fortune's foe than her favourite. The irony comes full circle.

Base Fortune, now I see that in thy wheel  
There is a point to which when men aspire  
They tumble headlong down : that point I touched  
And seeing there was no place to mount up higher,  
Why should I grieve at my declining fall ?

His final acceptance of this fatal decree is a belated recognition that like Tamburlaine he also must die. Mortimer as a traveller

Goes to discover countries yet unknown.

Mortimer is a foil for Edward himself and maintains his hold upon the Queen; this has an ironically close parallel in Gaveston's ascendancy over the King. The tragedy of Edward II is of a private individual "flung into the vortex of great events". "All live to die, and rise to fall"—Edward tells Spenser. Classical, medieval or modern, the peripeteia is the same, the reversal from grandeur to misery.

The protagonists of Marlowe's plays, however, should not be looked upon as merely illustrative of a morality pattern. His characters are masters of their fate in a different way from the morality figure who cries: 'As wynde in water I wave' (*Castle of Perseverance*, 1.380) Marlowe is a

moral thinker ; but he does not invent character to illuminate moral judgments. *Doctor Faustus* is the most complex and the most controversial of Marlowe's plays. Faustus like Tamburlaine embodies one of our major unsolved problems : man's attempts to transcend his limits. Tamburlaine cries : 'Shall sickness prove me now to be a man ?' and Faustus soliloquizes in his study : 'Yet art thou still but Faustus and a man'. Faustus begins where Tamburlaine ends ; Marlowe has only returned to a more human level of experience. Faustus has not sought knowledge with the longing to penetrate into the sources of life, but with an unmodified craving to soar above his human state. A new Lucifer he has hankered after a godlike omnipotence. This is the symptom of that most vicious leprosy of our unhallowed time. Faustus symbolises the vanity and crisis of knowledge without conscience. The framework of irony within which Marlowe presents Faustus's tragedy becomes an allegory for our century. "The play's treatment of the theme of sin is allegorical—or at least exemplary—and thus timeless ; yet the very complications and technicalities of sixteenth-century witchcraft help to locate the action and prevent it from being too abstract".<sup>8</sup> Valdes and Cornelius (not present in the *Faust-Book*) are sharply individualised though shabby figures. Greg points out that they are "no deeply versed magicians welcoming a promising beginner but merely the devil's decoys luring Faustus along the road to destruction".<sup>9</sup>

Faustus the universal scholar rejects all existing forms of knowledge ; but even in his most impious moments of rejection he cannot forget God and heaven—'necromantic books are heavenly'; 'a sound magician is a mighty God.' He even invokes the aid of God to give him the new sense of power. In scene three even Mephistopheles, the stealer of souls urges Faustus to save his soul ; and the man with a soul in pride and insolence throws away his soul and sneers at the weakness of his adviser. Faustus affixes the bloody signature with a blasphemous mockery of the last words of Jesus on the Cross : 'consummatum est.' Thus Faustus willy-nilly belongs to a Christian world where redemption is a cardinal fact. What Marlowe's religious beliefs were when he wrote this play cannot be properly ascertained, but there is nothing in it which could not have been written by a convinced Christian. Marlowe preserved and continued the traditional story.<sup>10</sup> Mephistopheles is both the ally and the enemy of Faustus. There are moments when Faustus curses his doubtful deliverer :

When I behold the heavens then I repent,  
And curse thee, wicked Mephistopheles,  
Because thou hast depriv'd me of those joys.

The Good and Evil Angels appear and we witness Lucifer's pageant of the seven deadly sins. This may be said to be the kind of knowledge that the devil can give. Wagner tells us that Faustus is still studying astronomy : the heavens are still on his mind. However, Faustus seeks power alone and power corrupts him as it does all. It becomes in him a kind of intoxication, In the last act Faustus's inner conflict is sharply projected as a wavering between repentance and perdition. In his final hour the fact of redemption to which Faustus has closed his eyes for so many years becomes apparent to him with a terrifying clarity. "The apostrophe to Helen stands out from its context, not because anthologists excerpt it, but because Marlowe carefully designed it to be a set piece, a purple passage, a supreme invitation to love."<sup>11</sup> But it would be careless not to relate it to the central theme of the play. The play's irony is never deeper than here. Helen stands for physical pleasure ; she is also a symbol of classical civilisation which in the Renaissance called forth such devotion. 'Her beauty is 'heavenly'; 'heaven is in these lips/ And all is dross that is not Helena.' Once again we have here the values turned upside down. The ironic secondary meaning of the passage suggests destruction. The 'topless towers' are familiar symbols for illimitable aspiration and Marlowe juxtaposes them to the all-consuming element of fire--'burnt the topless towers of Ilium.' One may also say that Faustus's soul is 'topless' which means lofty. Faustus also burns with passion and is also doomed to a burning hell. The fire of lust also suggests the fire of hell.

Sweet Helen make me immortal with a kiss--

Faustus exclaims in the very act of surrendering his true immortality. Has he not given up eternal life to have doubtful immortality in hell ? Faustus makes a startling comparison of Helen to Jupiter--'brighter art thou than flaming Jupiter' and he compares himself to Semele ; and like Semele he will also be destroyed by the flaming vision of Jupiter. Helen is also

More lovely than the monarch of the sky  
In wanton Arethusa's azur'd arms.

William Modlen, the Macmillan editor, comments : " ..the water-nymph Aréthusa was beloved by the River-God Alpheus (see Shelley's *Arethusa*). Marlowe's mythology seems to be at fault."<sup>12</sup> Marlowe's mythology is not at fault. Arethusa was one of the Hesperides loved by Jupiter ; she is the sunset which also suggests the flames ; the glow of the sunset will slowly merge into the night as Faustus's soul will be lost in eternal darkness. By a curious extension symbols of religious belief have become metaphors of passion ; an aesthetic surface masks an ethical reality. The justly famous scene has never lacked admirers and it is only appropriate

to see it as the climax of a subtle and psychologically profound study not as an impressive fragment. It is an apt commentary on all those who aspire beyond the human condition. Faustus accepts damnation rather than acknowledge a limit to man's capacity. Marlowe's view of Christianity is certainly implicit in this play ; and it is that the Christian Promise of Salvation is one way out of the human dilemma. Ribner says if Marlowe lived longer, he might have attempted a play on christian affirmation<sup>18</sup>. But in *Doctor Faustus* Marlowe emphasises the unheroic stature of the hero and the power of Lucifer. The terror and futility of life are revealed as they never had been before in English drama. There seems to be no compensating hope of any kind available to Faustus. I believe that Ellis-Fermor is partly correct in seeing *Dr. Faustus* as a play about Marlowe's own sense of loss and frustration. It remains one of the most personal of Marlowe's plays and perhaps of all Elizabethan drama. In the figure of Faustus we see the perennial human aspiration to reconstruct a universe in terms of unlimited power without unlimited responsibility, indulgence without retribution. Marlowe's final achievement in tragedy is that in his last two plays he was able to present a comprehensive view of mankind and to make some statement about the relation of good and evil in the world, as every tragic vision must.

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## GEORGE MEREDITH'S HANDLING OF TIME \*

AMITABHA SINHA

GRANTED the twentieth century fascination for time, its special importance in the formal organization of the novel cuts across periods, no doubt because of, as Ian Watt says, the novel's "closeness to the texture of daily experience".<sup>1</sup> A conspectus of the development of the novel from Fielding to the recent, French antinovelists surely testifies to this generic importance of time—although the treatment of time in the twentieth-century novel is obviously much more intricate than before. However, all novelists, whether old or new, do not necessarily give a deliberate attention to time as, say, the ones mentioned a few lines back do. Meredith, however, consciously manipulates time in his novels, a consideration of which reveals important features of his structure and technique. To do will be the business of this essay, something not done by anybody as yet.

A few more generalizations, however, are necessary. The ramifications of functional time in Meredith's novels, as indeed in novels in general, are based on the distinction between "external" or clock and calendar time and "experiential" or subjective time, across which cuts the other important distinction between "fable"-time and reader's time. Instead of attempting here a theoretical summary of the complex functions which these constitute, I shall let this essay develop them in the terms in which Meredith himself handles time: these terms are, briefly, Meredith's treatment of chronology, then his breaking down of chronology, and finally, his complete upsetting of external time.

Firstly, Meredith's treatment of chronology. While it is true that novels must follow some sort of a chronology—for stories are growths of events in time—it requires to be pointed out that Meredith is one of those novelists (like Fielding, Emily Bronte, and Joyce) who builds a palpable and deliberately patterned chronology. Thereby he produces an awareness of calendar and clock time, which becomes a necessary part of the reader's response to his stories. *Harry Richmond* perhaps least

\* Textual references are to the *Memorial Edition* of the Works of George Meredith, London : Constable. 1910-11.

shows the tendency ; elsewhere the tendency is more prominent, though with varying intensity. What is more important is that Meredith does not impose the chronology from the outside through obvious statements, but makes it develop itself through cross-references and inferences. For my purpose, I shall deal with a few, selected novels as representative instances of his control of chronology.

In the beginning, I shall briefly illustrate Meredith's general methods of building a chronology from *Richard Feverel* (1859), his first novel, the chronology consisting of months, seasons, and years. The action of the novel starts on Richard's fourteenth birthday in a certain October (p.10). Later on, on the day of his marriage, Richard is nineteen years and six months old, as Clare accurately says (p.337). The month of Richard's marriage is, consequently, April, calculating from the above-mentioned reference. While July is the time of their honeymoon (p.354), the time when Richard and Lucy are separated after their marriage is found from a cross-reference to be September, as we learn the fact from Mrs. Berry and Ripton talking to one another in November (p.423). The Richmond party, where Richard's temptation will first start, is arranged "on a morning in October" (p.401, also see p.402), and this by implication covers Richard's birthday, which needs must be the twentieth. Incidentally, since the period of separation also covers October, its coincidence with the germination of the "temptation" gives an ironical and symbolical significance to the twentieth birthday. The time when Lucy is "rescued" and taken to London by Mrs. Berry is January next year (p.461). About a month later (p.481), that is, in February—this is supported by the reference to a "winter sun" in another context (mentioned below)—Richard meets his father in London. It is around this time that Lucy gives birth to her baby, since the "winter sun" is mentioned when Lucy has already christened her baby (p.483), an information very casually given : incidentally, the time of this occurrence clicks with Richard's marriage with Lucy in April. Richard learns this news at the time of "the summer air" (p.519). Moreover, it is early summer, probably May or June, inferred from Adrian's statement, "we had a fine spring" (p.500), which is mentioned to Austin at a time just before the latter goes to Germany to give the news to Richard. That also is roundabout the time of the novel's ending ; for Richard's arrival in England, his fighting the duel and the consequent tragedy with which the novel ends (chs. XLIV-XLV), all immediately follow the above (and therefore take place in May or June in that early summer). The total time-span of the action is, therefore, six years and six or seven months.

*Richard Feverel* well illustrates the general significance of Meredith's

treatment of chronology. Firstly and obviously, the chronology gives the action something like a "historical" realism, inasmuch it produces a concrete view of the time of the action. Secondly, by enveloping the action in a nearly complete framework of recognizable time—the six and odd years—the chronology tends to perform the structural function of the unity of time. Thirdly, the interesting, indirect manner of building the chronology reveals one of the most distinctive features of Meredith's treatment of time. The chronology, as we saw, is not effected in an obvious way but through cross-referential calculations and inferences, and through information casually given in the course of the action, the times of the occurrence being only occasionally stated by the author. (That this casual information always clicks with the calculations shows that it is deliberately given.) Again, these cross-references and inferences give an inner structural cohesion to the story in terms of time. Through these devices Meredith weaves the awareness of time inside the texture of the story, subtly compelling the reader into accepting it; thereby he gives the story a dimension which is not possible in mere namings of months, seasons and years<sup>1</sup>.

Interesting as these general features are, what I find to be the still more important aspect of Meredith's treatment of chronological time lies in continuity, that is, the succession of units of time—days, months, or years—without any greatly recognizable gap of the unaccounted-for time between them. Through this, the very movement of time implicit in all novels, "the interminable tapeworm", as Forster calls it,<sup>2</sup> is dramatized within the action instead of being imposed on it from the outside. Since this must involve a closely packed succession of events—mental or physical—within a limited compass of time, this produces dramatic concentration in the action. This is a special characteristic of the technique of modern novelists,<sup>4</sup> which culminated in Joyce's full-scale application of it in *Ulysses* and this is one of the reasons why Meredith's effecting of continuity in his novels deserves a special notice.

We shall start from continuity *within* days—which produces the highest concentration of dramatic movement. It is now and then seen that, when seeking to produce a scenic "action", Meredith tends to prolong his presentation of a day as far as possible. Mostly, in such cases he makes the day prolong itself beyond one chapter, thus transcending the sense of a formal break that a chapter implies, and effects a sense of unimpeded continuity of time. Thus, for example, the day on which the main action of *The Amazing Marriage* (1895) opens, begins in chapter I at dawn, wears through the noon, the afternoon, and the evening, and goes upto the end of chapter IV, covering fifty-four pages (33-87). One day

in *The Egoist* (1879), the longest in the novel, perhaps in all Meredith's novels, thus covers one hundred and seventeen pages (496-613) and nine chapters (XLI-XLIX), and is one of the most remarkable instances of continuity in the pre-twentieth-century novel.<sup>5</sup> An interesting way in which Meredith effects such continuity needs special mention. Obviously such a presentation requires at least the minimum references to parts of a day, *viz.* morning, afternoon, etc. Meredith often accentuates these parts for a still greater concentration and a more emphasized continuity, in terms of clock-symbols, and sometimes of universal, time-denoting activities such as breakfast, lunch and so on. Let us take another day from *The Egoist*, for instance. It starts from breakfast (p.171), and it gradually goes through "fifteen minutes left for lunch-bells" (p.214), afternoon (p.215), "anticipation of the dinner-bell" (p.224), eleven o'clock after dinner (p.237) and then merges into the dawn of the next day (p.243)—thus, in all covering seventy-two pages and seven chapters. Incidentally, the presentation of days in the bulk of *The Egoist* is full of such references (an account of these days is given below.)

The same principle as in the case of single days,<sup>6</sup> leads Meredith to present the continuity of *days in succession*. In such cases, time wears through the narration of a detailed experience, which takes it beyond the limitation of one day. Following the term used by Beach, I shall call the large time-units, formed by such successive, continuous days as "suites". My first instance is from *The Amazing Marriage*, where six such continuous days merge into one another, covered by fifty-seven pages (371-428) and five-odd chapters (between chs. XXXV and XLI). The first day of the "suite" starts on a March morning (p. 371) with the meeting between Carinthia and Fleetwood in Wales; the action proceeds onwards throughout the day, until night comes (371-91), Fleetwood tosses wide awake in the night, after Carinthia's rejection of him, and the night breaks into the next day (pp.391-92). This second day, immediately starting from the morning—with Fleetwood starting for London—, wears through the evening and the night (the time, 2 a.m., is mentioned in p. 100) when Fleetwood and his associates are at the opera (pp.398-402); then it continues into the morning of the next day (9 a.m., p.402). The third day, beginning with the picnic arrangements, moves on to evening (Gower "dining", p.405 ), and then upto night ( p.406 ), as Fleetwood enters Gower's room for a conversation. The night continues for four pages ( pp. 406-9 ), with Gower and Fleetwood engaged in a hot debate, until the next morning. This day, the fourth, starting when Fleetwood and Gower are still together, continues with the latter's subsequent (that is, some hours later, p.413) proposal of marriage to

Madge and his meeting with Carinthia. This is followed by the fifth day starting with Gower meeting Fleetwood once more (p.418); this day continues upto the night (presented in pp.426-27), and then onto the sixth day (p.427), with Fleetwood once more rejected by Carinthia, departing for London. This day ends when night comes with Fleetwood conversing with Lord Feltre (p. 428). This instance, by the way, is especially signified by continuity through nights (nights—which are not periods of activities—not being included in ordinary presentations of continuity); this is necessitated by the requirement of presenting the tense, mental imbalance of Fleetwood, which keeps him awake through the nights.<sup>7</sup>

Meredith applied the principle of continuity on a broader level to certain cases where the entire chronology of years, months, and days is presented as a continuous whole without any considerable gaps of time left unexplained. However, two things require to be pointed out. Firstly, an ideal continuity without any gaps can never be effected, for the necessities of selection and accentuation of facts entail cracks and diffusions in the continuity (even in *Ulysses*, the clock is made to stop at points and resume continuity later on). Only, the illusion of a ceaseless continuity can be effected, where the cracks are made as unnoticed as possible. Secondly, the chronologies of Meredith are mostly in terms of big units of time like years and months unlike the eighteen-hour day of *Ulysses*. As such, the cracks in them are necessarily of a bigger size in the form of panoramic references or summaries.

I shall cite *The Egoist* as a characteristic instance. After the exposition of a bit of Willoughby's past three years ago (pp. 12-30), the total time span of the action of the novel is seen to cover five years and about two months, the major part of the action being contained in twentysix days in the first month of the ninth year. In the panoramic beginning, the continuity is effected in the presentation of the movement of time through April-to-April cycles. At first there is a panorama of three years ending on April 30 ( pp. 26-29 ) ; this is succeeded by another year terminating in the next April ( p. 33 ), which in its turn is followed by the immediately succeeding year ending with still another April ( p. 61 ). This is the point where the drama of the main action starts, with Willoughby's invitation to the Middletons. After a presentation of two separate days ( pp. 63-88, 112-21 ), each followed by a short, indefinite interval ( e.g., pp. 95, 105, 121 ) and all of them succeeded by a passage of three consecutive days ( pp. 143-46 ), the drama starts gathering intensity in Clara's first straining after freedom (ch. XIII). From now on, eight successive days are presented, starting from the fourth day. Each continues through its various parts measured by daily activities like "breakfast" or by the

"clock", and then continues into the next—sometimes even taking nights in their stride. This goes on till the end of the comedy is reached ( p.625 ), barring barely one page for the very short, appendixlike end ( that reaches upto June ). These eight continuous days are covered by four hundred and seventy-nine pages and about thirty-eight chapters, the total number of pages in the novel being 626, and they form the largest time—"suite" in Meredith's novels.<sup>8</sup>

Of this type of continuity, perhaps the most representative instance is of *One of Our Conquerors* ( 1891 ). The chronology of the novel comprises two-odd years, and the first, complete year from April to April, covered by the major part of the story and presented in the first five-hundred and ten pages ( the total is five-hundred and fourteen ), and ending in Victor's madness is very remarkably presented as a continuous whole through even increasing units of time—first single then "suites", finally structures—which are eleven in number—comprising the "suites" and separated by occasional passages of time.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, what is especially remarkable about the continuity of time in this novel relates to a still larger time-frame constituted by the second year which is summarized in the epilogue-like, four pages, recounting Victor's death and Nesta's marriage with Dartrey ( pp. 511-14 ). The significant fact to be noticed is that this second year *immediately* follows the first, carrying the flow of time from the latter in a rather interesting manner. The first year ends on the night of the catastrophe with the statement, "that night's infinite sadness...concentrated on Nesta" ( p. 510 ). This is immediately followed by the opening statement of the next para where the summary starts—the opening of the second year :

The night went past *as a year*. The year followed it *as a refreshing night*. Slowly lifting her [ Nesta ] from our abysses, "it was a good angel to the girl" ( p. 511, italics mine. )

It is thus that the movement of time continues uninterrupted from the first year which expands as it were, or, to borrow a filmic term, "fades out", through its last night into the second year. This sense of continuity is strengthened by the clever, interpenetrating juxtaposition of the images of the night and the year in one another's terms. It is further heightened by the narrative mechanism of putting the second year in the same chapter and not formally into a separate one, so that it is taken into the stride of continuity, without any sense of a break.

Finally, a unique point about continuity in the novel lies in the fact that the story does not end even with the second year, but proceeds after Nesta's recovery and marriage, and the conclusion most artistically dramatizes the very principle of continuity. Meredith does this by bring-

ing about a parity between the inevitable end of the action and the theoretical implication that no action, continuous in time, should ever stop. He does this by cleverly using a conventional way of ending novels, namely, the historic present, which he causes to break into the fictional preterite in the last paragraph of the final summary (p. 514). Here we see that people *keep doing* things: Skepsey rejoices in the service of his new master, Dartrey; Colney goes on writing his satires which *produce* the "flush" of contemporary reviews; the comedy of vegetarianism and teetotalism continue separating Pempton and Priscilla just as religious divisions *keep* Louise and Peridon asunder. Unlike most endings of Victorian novels, this neither looks forward to the future nor affords a satisfied sense of completion, for there is nothing new that is indicated in these activities.<sup>10</sup> What these characters do now is what they have been always doing—as the action of the novel testifies—and the narration here shows the action in a state of *continuous present*. This continuous present serves as a dramatized image of the eternal continuity of time, and can be described as the continuity of time into timelessness.<sup>11</sup>

Another, and a secondary aspect of Meredith's use of chronology, which is nevertheless allied with continuity, is what I would call modulation. This consists in the relation between the chronology and the reader's time, representing the varying interest of the subject-matter. While at its basis lies the old difference between the narrative methods of panorama and scene, the method can secure important effects when the action is limited between two *recognizable* points in time and thereby gets a dramatic intensity. Sometimes, Meredith very precisely manipulates the relationship between the reading time (that is, the page-space) and the time-distances between events, which very aptly expresses the varying tempo of the action, so that the chronology acquires a depth instead of having an one-dimensional, flat appearance. Not that this is a regular phenomenon in Meredith, but it is a unique occurrence that deserves special notice. The most characteristic examples of this are found in *Vittoria* (1867; a novel remarkable for the treatment of time in many respects), as I shall now illustrate.

The action of the novel starts in the August (pp. 26, 46) of 1847,<sup>12</sup> and ends in the spring (p. 616)—certainly March, may be a little later—of 1849 (ch. XLVI), and thus comprises about one year and seven months, which is its "dramatic" framework. Of these, the passage of four months from September '47 to January '48, is only indicated, and that leaves about fifteen months which are actually presented (this is followed by a very brief panorama of ten years). The greater part of the narrative, the first movement of the action (chs. I-XXVIII), covers incidents within

one month from August to September, 1847, in twenty-eight chapters (I-XXVIII) comprising 367 pages (1-367), out of the fifteen months or so covered in the total of forty-six chapters and 626 pages (the Epilogue apart). This movement presents the dramatic series of events, all inevitably leading to the climax of the scene at La Scala ( chs. XIX-XXI ) and then with Vittoria's flight, gradually losing their tension. Now, the awareness produced of the strict limitation of one month, in which so many pages and chapters have been squeezed, no doubt gives the sense of a high-powered intensity to the action. By simple calculation, we find an apt image of this intensity in contrast with the succeeding parts of the narration, in terms of chapter—and page-numbers given to an average month. Thus we see that the intensity of this part ( pages and chapters mentioned above ) is about eighteen times greater than that in the rest of the narration whose twentytwo chapters and 279 pages cover the remaining fourteen months or so of the action.

*Within* this first movement, again, varying modulations of chronology are produced with equal, if not a greater effect. This becomes evident from the end of chapter VII, which eventually lands us in September ; it is from now that the dramatic tension leading to the episode of La Scala gathers momentum. Consequently, the bulk of the action is presented in the continuity—internal as well as “suite”-wise—of a few, successive, recognizable days, from the 13th to the 18th of September. Here the action gradually grinds nearer to its climax on the 15th and the movement of time is correspondingly seen to become slower and more detailed. An idea of this can be formed from the following comparative estimate of the number of chapters and pages devoted to each day. The 13th is covered by a little more than 2 chapters (VIII-X) and 21 pages (76-97). The 14th, on which day the suspense in anticipation of the gala event increases, is presented in roughly 5 chapters (in X-XV) and 81 pages ( 97-178 ). The critical 15th is covered by a little more than 7 chapters (XV-XXII) and 83 pages (178-261). The few climactic hours of this day, where the suspense is concentrated, are presented in 4 chapters (XIX-XXII) and 50 pages (211-61) out of the 7 chapters and 83 pages ; the movement of time slows down to a minimum pace through almost every incident in these hours. The climax over, the action gets less intense dramatically, and correspondingly the movement of time is shown as becoming faster and more diffuse. The incidents in the next 3 days—from the 16th to the 18th—are covered by 4 chapters (XXIII-XXVI) and 58 pages (262-320) : it may be noted that the chapter—and page-equivalents of a day here (about 2 and 19 respectively) are less than those of the 13th (2 and 21 respectively). The action gets even much less intense in

the following events of *Vittoria's* stay in Meran, where the contours of time are seen to have become blurred and its movement still faster, so that about a week or so (after a few days) is covered by 2 chapters (XXVII-XXVIII) and only 47 pages (321-67). These accentuations and reliefs effect an awareness of the tempo of time which in its turn helps our reaction to the varying intensity of the action.<sup>18</sup>

The examination of Meredith's presentation of chronology thus leads to two general conclusions, already indicated: firstly, these build an awareness of the passage of time when the events occur, which makes the action credible and vivid; secondly, these also serve as technical means of determining the readers' aesthetic response to the subject-matter of the novels. We shall now turn to those aspects of Meredith's presentation of time, which, subsuming chronology, point in other directions.

## II

Another important feature of Meredith's handling of time is that he does not always strictly follow a straightforward chronology of events in his narration, but upsets it at certain key-points by pushing the action back and forth. He does this either to effect a simultaneity of events or to make diverse strands of the action converge simultaneously on one point for the sake of dramatic emphasis. These are occasions where the chronology of events as they happened and the chronology of their narration differ, and show interesting instances of the "time-shift" device.

Sometimes, Meredith achieves this even by making the omniscient narrator's retrospective vision cut across the current action. As for instance, in *Evan Harrington* (1860), after the action begins and continues from Mel's death onward (chs. I-II), the narrator performs a flash-back to the past of the story (before Mel's death) to tell us about the careers of Mel's children and to prepare us for the subsequent events of the "current" action (ch. III). What is significant is that the narrator does not exactly adopt the loose method of "harking back to make up", for the flash-back is not just a plain summary of the past, but consists of a short summary (pp.19-23) followed by a scenic presentation of the actions (pp. 24-30). The dramatically narrated events of the sisters' past lives, converging on that of the Countess de Salder, continue into the scene on board the Jocasta as Evan with Rose and the Countess is coming back to England (ch. IV). This scheme is lodged at a time concurrent with that of the present action of the novel, and ends where the thread of the latter is picked up once more. The whole chapter (III) is thus like a separate story, co-eval with the former chapters, and is not a sudden interruption by the past of the present. As a matter of fact, this tech-

nique achieves for *Evan Harrington* the interesting case of two beginnings, fulfilling the dramatic requirement of the story. Thus, the scene of Great Mel's death, followed by the creditors waiting for Evan's arrival (pp.1-6), is one beginning ; the Countess and Evan coming to England (they do not know about Mel's death), is another. The ultimate meeting of these two simultaneous events in chapter IV achieves drama for us, so that we watch at the same time two separate, unconnected motives, travelling forward to determine the course of the principal action. Although "panoramically" manipulated, this, therefore, diminishes the very sense of intrusion which omniscience implies, and produces the effect of "time-shift" or "chronological looping" which characterizes so much of modern fiction.

The more frequent manner in which Meredith cuts across chronology is not through such omniscient methods but by shuttling the *continuous dramatic present* of the action. The past is recapitulated, but almost entirely in a scenic manner and with no signs of manipulation, so that the effect produced is that of the story itself roving back in time. Through the breaking down of straightforward narration in this manner, Meredith not only skirts round the necessity of an intruding retrospect but also achieves another, more important effect. He maintains the unity of the dramatic surface of the action and at the same time shows its inner multiple strands which secures matured effects of "time-shift".

I shall turn again to *Evan Harrington* for an example—quite a simple one—to give an idea of the method. This is from chapters XXV-XXVII of the novel. At the end of chapter XXV (pp. 318-21), Rose and Evan decide to tell Lady Jocelyn about their relationship, and then proceed to meet her. The following chapter, however, does not present subsequent events. It narrates how Mrs. Mel learns from Goren's letter about Evan's activities at Beckley Court and starts for that place. All this happens at a time co-terminous with that of the earlier chapters, conveyed through the opening statement of this chapter, "at this period... Mrs. Mel" (p. 321). The opening of the next chapter (XXVII) takes us back to the present of the main action through the narration of how Evan and Rose continue their activities (pp. 339 onwards) which we had last seen at the end of chapter XXV. The interpolation of the Mrs. Mel scene in the intervening chapter thus presents a simultaneous strand of action. Its importance lies in the fact that it imperceptibly prepares us for the later, second "Bull-dogs" chapter XXXI. For, this chapter presents a scene which continues the action in two previous chapters (XXV and XXVI), and the same scene presents Mrs. Mel's dramatic appearance in the picnic, which will ultimately upset Evan and Rose. Thus this last chapter ("Bull-

dogs") becomes a terminating point of two simultaneous actions, but without incurring for the author the responsibility of explaining how it came to pass.

The next, and perhaps, a more interesting instance is from *Vittoria*. This is in the chapters, (XXIII-XXVI) presenting the events of Vittoria's flight after the La Scala event on the 15th September. The technique is used for effectively leading us to the famous "duel in the pass" (ch. XXVI) ...the events of which cover the same time as covered by the earlier three chapters. These chapters show Captain Weisspriess journeying to capture Vittoria, and also the time spanned by Vittoria's and Angelo's journey in chs. XXIII-XXV : this narration goes on till the two strands meet together (p. 308) in chapter XXVI, being discussed now. The account opens with the statements, "meanwhile Weisspriess had not remained idle" (p. 302) and "he remained at the sub-Alpine inn until his servant Wilhelm arrived" (p. 303). Now, since from chapter XXIII we learn that Vittoria had shaken off Weisspriess's trail at the sub-Alpine inn on the night of the 16th, these activities of Weisspriess must be from the 16th onward. In p.302 we find that Weisspriess is at Vermiglio, moving towards Trent ; he reaches Trent on that day (p. 306), starts for Cles on the next morning, "one hour before dawn" (p. 306), arrives at the place to learn that Vittoria has just passed in advance of him (pp. 306-7), and orders his men to capture the members of the fugitive Vittoria's party and send them all (except Vittoria) to Cles (p. 307). Now, from chapter XXIV we know that Vittoria was last seen to be heading for Meran, leaving Angelo, on the 18th September (pp. 285-86); on the same day, as we learn from the next chapter (XXV), Angelo found three men and one woman (who, we know, are from Vittoria's party) at Cles, being marched by an Austrian (p.301). Obviously, when we learn of Weisspriess's activities (mentioned above) in Cles in the later narration, we make an instant cross-reference to Angelo's discovery, and know Weisspriess to have been active on the 18th. Since the sub-Alpine-inn-Vermiglio phase of Weisspriess's activities is narrated as having taken place on the previous day, its date must be on the 17th, and therefore, the period during which he stayed at the sub-Alpine inn must be between the 16th and 17th. Thus Weisspriess's activities, the substance of the first part of chapter XXVI, cover the total movement of time from the 16th to the 18th, and represent a flash-back to a different strand parallel to the main action related to Vittoria's flight in the previous chapters (XXIII-XV). The consequent effect of this time-manouvre in our imagination is the spectacle of the hunter and the quarry running parallel on their courses at the same period of time, even day by day. No doubt this greatly heightens the suspense of the action which is leading towards a

climax, where the two strands—Weisspriess and Vittoria—meet on the evening of the 18th (same chapter, p. 308), and result in the duel in the pass between Angelo and Weisspriess. A comparison between the chronology of the events and the chronology of narration in the following chart will help to have a clearer and a more graphic picture of the movement.

<i>Date</i>	<i>Chronology of events</i>	<i>Chapter</i>	<i>Chronology of Narration</i>
16th	(1) Vittoria slips away from Weisspriess (ch. XXIII)	XXIII	Vittoria slips away from Weisspriess (16th).
	(2) Weisspriess stays on at the inn (XXVI)		
17th	(1) Vittoria on her way to Cles (not narrated)	XXIV	Vittoria going to Meran (18th).
	(2) Weisspriess met by Wilhelm, and going to Vermiglio (XXVI)		Angelo meeting the party of four (18th).
18th	(1) Vittoria going toward Meran (XXIV) and Angelo meeting the party of four (XXV)	XXVI	Weisspriess staying on at the inn, and his activities (16th-18th).
	(2) Weisspriess going from Trent to Cles (XXVI).		Vittoria on her way to Cles (17th).
	18th evening : Vittoria and Weisspriess meet ; ch.XXVI.		

A more complex case will be seen in our last instance, from *One of Our Conquerors*. This is in chapters XXXI-XXXIII (pp.365-94 ; here the pages are of a special importance, as we shall see), presenting the happenings of some hours on the morning of a certain day. In the course of chapter XXXI, Skepsey heads for Brighton in a train on an early morning and in the course of the chapter, he meets the Rev. Septimus in the same compartment ; after both get off at Brighton, the latter informs the other that he is going to meet Nesta presently and disappears (pp. 365-72). The unit of time continues, with Skepsey meeting Dartrey and then with Dartrey's subsequent activities, till the latter, walking with Colonel Sudley, meets Nesta and Septimus walking towards them near the pier ( p. 388 ). This meeting which reminds us of the Reverend's farewell message to Skepsey (p.371), acts as the point which flashes the action back to where the Reverend had left Skepsey. From this page (388) and from the beginning of chapter XXXIII, the action in the Reverend's area of action continues onward, presenting the scene between Nesta and him—in course of which the secret of her parentage is divulged to her. It comes to an end in p. 394 with a repetition of their meeting

with Dartrey and Sudley, which was already narrated in a previous page (388). It is in this meeting that the distinctive quality of this particular manipulation of time lies. Its difference from ordinary flash-backs is easily perceived. While those are effected from any point in time in the presentation of *one* action which is met at a later point by another action, here the meeting point of the two parallel strands is also the point from where the flash-back is effected ; the flash-back and then the retraction together for a cyclic movement. This is why the meeting is twice narrated, and it is to be noticed that its significance is different each time : the first time it is from Dartrey's point of view, when he sees Nesta's white face, mistaking it to have been due to Major Worrell's treatment of her (p.389), and the second time it is from the Reverend's point of view, who is too engrossed in his wooing of Nesta to do anything more than mechanically salute Dartrey and Sudley (p.394). The meeting is thus shown not merely through the narration, but principally through our imaginative piecing together of the two points of view. The *montaging* of two situations with which the technique rounds off the flash-back, gives a perfect example of chronological looping, and comes very close to filmic devices used for the same kind of effect<sup>14</sup>.

### III

A different but related manner in which Meredith transcends chronological narration is in his manipulation of the time-locus,<sup>15</sup> that is, the particular matrix of time in which narration is made. This is something which concerns the involvement of the reader in either the narrator's time, also to be described as the reader's historical present, or in the fictional or fable-time. By shunting the reader in between the two or only within the latter, Meredith produces certain effects which are not possible in an one-dimensional chronological narration made from a fixed point in the narrator's present. As we shall see, this quite often shows functional uses of the technique of dramatized narrators, especially of agent-narrators.

My first instance, taken from *Chloe* (1879 ; Memorial ed., XXI), provides a quite interesting illustration of the inter-relation between different time-loci. The "historical" present (of the narrator) is dramatized, as placed somewhere in the nineteenth century, from where he narrates the story (from ch.II) and gives the "review" of the Ballad (ch.I). This is suggested through his contemporaneity with the poets (p.194) ; the events of the story, too, refer back to a past suggestive of the eighteenth century (e.g., pp.191-92, 215).

Along with the narration, the story also comes partly through the

"memoirs" of the beau—the "fictional" source—<sup>16</sup> who declares them to be records of events, made by him fifteen years later. This narration through the memoirs sets the events at a second remove from us. Then again, the narrator's account itself very often adopts the points of view of characters, as that of the beau—not as the later recorder but as an individual in the story—Chloe and Susan; this involves us in the immediate dramatic present of the story. Thus the reader is involved in three time-scales in the narration. Firstly, the immediate involvement imparts to us a vivid impression of the experience presented and helps us to understand the limitations of the points of view. Secondly, a still dramatic involvement is produced by the Memoirs, but their retrospective account naturally has a detachment denied to the direct involvement. This effects a contrast between the beau's earlier limited vision and later horrified enlightenment (p.265), which makes us gauge his mistakes and understand his development to sobriety and self-knowledge (esp. p. 266). Thirdly, the perspective of the reader's (or narrator's) present which helps us to look at the story with another sort of detachment. We are enabled to estimate the emotions of the later (or maturer) beau writing his memoirs from a similar, detached perspective (pp.265-66). Besides, the occasional mock-serious but semi-sympathetic tone of the narrator, from his aloof stand in the historical present, produces the sense of a choric non-involvement against which the shock of Chloe's story is effectively contrasted.

My next instance is from *Harry Richmond* (1871), effected entirely through agent-narrators, and made more interesting by the fact of the first-person technique of the story. Certain interesting effects of multi-time-level narration are produced by the manner of recounting the Dauphin-episode, scattered in a variety of contexts in two chapters (XLI-XLII). The episode, calculated to illuminate the attitude of the London Society to Roy and his tragic comedy, takes place in Harry's absence, and therefore can be told by the narrator that is, Harry, only on the basis of other characters' reports.

It is to be noticed that the very process of communication through which Harry is enlightened is dramatized, as different agent-narrators tell the tale at different times, from different angles. He receives the first version from the Squire, who tells him and Captain Bulsted with great relish how some city-people made fun of Roy by getting him together with a "pretender" to the French throne (pp 473-75). Harry determines to find out the whole story (the Squire's account being second-hand itself, (p.477). In the process of his doing so, all other details of the story are gradually unfolded to him through a number of other agent-narrators

reporting the story at different times on a later day in London (ch.XLII). Harry first meets Jorian De Witt, from whose account he further learns that the Dauphin-episode was a deliberate trap laid for Roy by Lady Kane, Edbury and Tenby (pp.482-83). Next, Harry learns the story from Lady Kane herself and gathers from her that the affair had been very successful (p.484). After this he gets another version from his friend Temple, along with the important fact that "Edbury was the capital offender" (p.485). Finally, the entire episode is presented as a story pieced together from the accounts of Jennings, Jorian De Witt, Alton, and Wedderburn (pp.485-89). This narration of the Dauphin-episode has several functions. Firstly, being revolved across several points in time through this piecemeal narration, the episode is scooped out of the chronological succession of events. Thus it also produces the effect of the story telling itself, for the episode develops as a part of the main action and takes the strain off the shoulders of the narrator. Secondly, the story develops in the course of Harry's developing knowledge just as many real-life accounts are learnt, and secures an additional vividness. Thirdly, we are forced to align ourselves with Harry's immediate point of view, for it comes as part of the impression created in his mind. This would not have been possible had it come as one piece of retrospective narration from Harry in the capacity of a story-teller.

The most representative manipulation of time-locus is seen in the total narrative method of the rather ignored, unfinished work, *The Gentleman of Fifty*, (about 1869; Memorial ed., XXI). The chronology time-span of the story—so far as it goes—covers a little over one month, with occasional, short, indefinite intervals. There are two distinct time planes seen to be operating in the story. One is the narrative time-locus. This, as the consequence of the alternate, first-person narration by 'He' and 'She', is in a state of continuity, consisting in the succession of the moments of narration of the six chapters, and is not static as in all "told" stories. The other is the time-continuum where the narrated events take place. What is more important is that these two time-continua interpenetrate into one another. This can be better understood in the light of the fact that the work does not merely recount the past external events, but, more important, dramatizes the mental movements of the two characters who react to these events. The succession of these mental movements make up an autonomous, and as a matter of fact, the chief story : Pollingray's ("His") realization of his love in old age for a young woman, and Alice's ("Her") gradual awakening to her love of Pollingray. It is against the context of this story that the "other" story of past events assumes its

significance, since these events come to us through the continuous retrospects which the two characters make of the events, after experiencing them. This intersection of the two time-planes is very well illustrated in the alternate movement of the narration in every chapter moving between two tenses : the *present*, which brings out the mental action at particular hours, and the *past*, in which flash-backs are constantly made to the recent events. Finally, the different time-points, in which the mental action progresses, precede as well as succeed the time-points of the recapitulated events, so that the total chronology comes in the form of an alternate succession of the two series.

Thus, the "narrative-time" of chapter I, coming from Pollingray, is obviously sometime after the episode of the Vicar and his wife, since it is retrospectively narrated (pp. 111-24). But this time-point is certainly before the Vicar's party—which took place after more than two weeks (p. 127). This is because here Pollingray's thoughts about Alice do not go beyond his first impression of her in the earlier Vicar-episode (pp. 122-23, 123-24), while his experience of her at the Vicar's party is different, and is suggested to be at a later time (pp. 131, 131-32). Pollingray's next chapter (III) comes definitely after the Vicar's party, judging from his reaction to the "musical laugh" at his expense, which Alice had let off in the party (p. 131). Its time is also the day after another, subsequent party, the happenings of which are recorded in the chapter (pp. 132-35). Now, the narrative time of chapter I suggests the feelings which Pollingray carries into the Vicar's party in the fable-time of chapter II. Similarly, the narrative time of chapter III suggests Pollingray's developing feelings for Alice (pp. 131-32, 135-37), which he carries from the party. Again, chapter II—coming from Alice—the narrative time of which is in between the two Pollingray chapters (I and III) presents her mental recapitulation not merely of the Vicar's party (pp. 128-31) but also of the Vicar-episode (pp. 126-27). That part of the episode which is given in her narration, complements Pollingray's account in chapter I, thus the Vicar-episode, revolved in two time-loci, is pictured in a round, two dimensional manner.

The narration develops interest from chapter IV onwards. The chapter, narrated by Alice when she is at Dayton Manor after three weeks of her stay there (p.138), first presents her feelings at this time (pp.137-38)—at her receipt of Charles's letter (informing of Pollingray's purpose in inviting her to Dayton Manor). Then, from the same time-point, the narration effects a flash-back to another point three weeks ago, presenting the incidents of three days (pp.138-49), and then comes back to her present time (pp.149-50). The fable-time of chapter VI, in Alice's narration,

almost coincides with the narrative time when she has come back home. It represents a point little less than one month after her visit to Dayton Manor (p.153),<sup>17</sup> where the incidents on the last night and the following morning of her stay at the Manor take place (pp.154-55,156). Since this period of time obviously assimilates her first three weeks at Dayton Manor, her feelings in the narrative present of chapter IV (mentioned above), which covers those weeks, become a part of the history of her stay. Chapter V, narrated by Pollingray, which intervenes in between these two chapters, adds a further interest to the time-pattern. Its narrative time is the last day of Alice's stay at Dayton Manor (p.153), and, therefore, it is fairly co-terminous with the last night in the *fable-time* of chapter VI. At this time Pollingray is thinking of Alice (pp.152-53), just as Alice *was* thinking simultaneously of him, listening to his sister's account of his earlier, frustrated love-affair with Louise (as we learn later from) ch. VI, pp.154-55), this effects a juxtaposition of their mental states. Again, in this chapter the chief subject-matter is Pollingray's present feelings about his earlier affairs with Louise, which took place twenty years ago (pp.150-52), and then about himself and Alice (pp.152-53). It is also important to note that the action during the last night and morning of Alice's stay in Dayton Manor in chapter VI is seen to be chiefly occasioned by her recapitulation of the Louise-affair (pp.154-56), just as the affair becomes the occasion of Pollingray's self-revelation in chapter V (mentioned above). The Louise-affair, thus montaging the two chapters, re-inforces the juxtaposition of Pollingray and Alice. Finally, each at this point has become wide awake to his or her love for the other—though without knowing the other's feelings—(pp. 152, 155-56); this gives a sense of near-completion to the unfinished work, and thereby makes the carefully planned counterpointing of the last two chapters functional to the story's end. The following chart of the chronology of the happenings of the story will help to realize the manipulation of time.

The operation of this double-time-plane of the story which we have seen above, can be summed up in two general conclusions. Firstly, the interaction between the two time-continua dramatizes "telling" as "showing", not at a distance from the story (as say, in *Harry Richmond*) but as part of the story that is being told. Secondly, the dramatized mental states which continually move between the past and the present in every chapter as also in the total narrative chronology makes it produce the same effects as of the developed stream-of-consciousness narration of modern fiction.<sup>18</sup>

<i>Time</i>	<i>Action</i>	<i>Time-Locus</i>	<i>Chapter and Page</i>
Twenty Years ago One day	Pollingray and Louise Affair. the Vicar-episode	Fable Fable	V, 154-55 VI, 150-51. I, 111-24.
A certain time	Pollingray's thoughts about Alice in his remembrance of the episode.	Narrative	II, 126-27. I, 111-24.
More than two weeks after (1) and some-time after (2)	The Vicar's party	' Fable	II, 128-31, III, 131 (implied)
A certain time after the Vicar's party but before she goes to Dayton Manor	Alice's thoughts.	Narrative.	II, 124-26, 127-28.
A certain time after the Vicar's party as well as after the above.	Miss Pollingray's lawn-party.	Fable	III, 132-33, 134-35.
The day after the lawn-party	Pollingray's developing love for Alice	Narrative.	III, 131-32, 133-34 135-37.
Three successive days, a short time after the lawn party	Events of Alice's stay at Dayton	Fable	IV, 138-50
Three weeks after the above	Alice's thoughts, and her manner of spending time at Dayton developing love for Alice	Narrative.	IV, 137-38.
The day before Alice's departure from Dayton and about one week after the above.	Pollingray's thoughts, esp. his further developing love for Alice	Narrative.	V, 150-53.
The night before, and the morning of Alice's departure.	Alice's farewell feelings and developing love for Pollingray, occasioned by Louise affair.	Fable	VI, 154-56.
A very short time after her departure.	Alice's completely transformed mental state, in love with Pollingray	Narrative.	VI, 153-54.

## IV

I now come down to a most interesting aspect of Meredith's treatment of time, namely, his upsetting not merely of chronology but of the very conception of chronological time. This springs from his rendering of "perceptual" or experiential time, meaning thereby time measured by the intensity of personal experiences presented in the novel, as opposed to external or "conceptual" time rendered through universal symbols such as the clock and the calendar.<sup>19</sup>

This is to some extent reflected in the presentations of the chronologies of some of the novels. In *Richard Feverel*, for example, the chronology of the six and odd years is measured mainly in relation to Richard's advancing in age, of which the initial focal point is his fourteenth birthday; moreover, this theme of growing up ironically off-sets Sir Austin's hopes in launching Richard into his career (p. 10). The chronology built up in the novel is thus coloured by the theme and does not exist merely to give the sense of a certain length of time. In *Vittoria*, the chronology of the first movement is measured by the 15th September, which stands not just a calendar date but because it is the particular day of the call for an uprising, which is eagerly anticipated by Vittoria even from the beginning (e.g., chs. II-VI) and is emotionally and actively reacted to by all the characters in this phase (chs. VII-XXII). The most interesting case of chronological time standing as an image of fictional experience is, however, in *One of Our Conquerors*, especially noticeable in the rendering of the first year which ends in Victor's catastrophe. It is, however, an awareness of time that comes from the subject-matter of the narrative, stemming largely from characters' consciousnesses—an awareness of the ruthless, tense passage of time chaining one to it. This is especially illustrated by Victor. Now, since Victor's life is a contradiction, his hopes for self-fulfilment can never be secured, and the entire story is seen to be consisting in his perpetual waiting for the realization of his dreams, especially for his release from Mrs. Burman. This endless waiting causes him eternally to count time in expectancy, because, as time flows on, he feels himself unable to master it. For instance, he waits hopelessly for months for the death of Mrs. Burman (e.g., pp. 466.67), he thinks of his long-waited-for release in time-images (e.g., p. 495), and carefully remembers the time of Mrs. Burman's invitation for "to-morrow, Sunday, four P.M. Odd, that next day at eight in the evening I shall be addressing our meeting" (p. 483). This sensitive time-awareness becomes almost his habit, seen in his consulting the watch every now and then. It is not Victor alone, however, but sometimes other characters, too, who feel themselves chained to the

passage of time, counting minutes, hours and days. This is either because the alliance with Victor pitches them into some vital problem or the other for which they expect a solution, or just because they are apprehensive observers of his activities. The chronology to which we are made so greatly responsive through its detailed presentation thus serves as an analogue of the time-awareness of Victor and others in the story. This experiential determination of chronological time especially in this novel, distinguishes Meredith from most of the earlier time-conscious novelists.

The general tendency towards "perceptual" colouring of time which these chronologies reveal is consummately presented in certain particular contexts where the limitation of time intensifies such experiential presentation. This is found, for instance, in some scenes of gruelling suspense where time moves very slowly (and covers many pages) in correspondence with the emotions of the characters. Such, for instance, is the scene of Diana's "death-chamber" watch (*Diana of the Crossways*, 1885, pp. 223-27) or in Clara's waiting for the train in *The Egoist* (pp. 320-29). It is most remarkable in *One of Our Conquerors* which is a very much "time-charged" book. Most interesting, however, is the narration of Wilfrid captured in Barto Rizzo's cell in *Vittoria*. Having covered the passage of time till January (p. 368) in the opening of the chapter, the narration adopts Wilfrid's point of view, and thereby shows the passage of two months which bridges an area of suspense till the Milanese rising of March (pp. 374-87). The movement here is presented solely in terms of psychological or perceptual time which replaces the clock and the calendar. To Wilfrid, imprisoned in Barto Rizzo's dark chamber where sunlight does not infiltrate, and where there is no clock or watch, external time is not merely slow but at times non-existent. In his desperate desire to catch up with the movement of this time in the outside world, he counts time by the regularity of the lamp and the food brought by Barto Rizzo's wife (p. 380). When even the lamp is taken away from the room, Wilfrid, suffering "from the pressure of the hideous featureless time" (p. 380), is shocked into finding at last from Rinaldo that it is eleven o'clock on a day in the first week of March, and is aghast at the thought that he has been for two months in a shirt (p. 382). The shirt, with its accumulated filth, is now the index of his awareness of time—like the lamp before. This serves also a rhetorical purpose, for it helps to dramatize the time-gap of two months between the Tobacco Riots (pp. 368-74) and the Milanese rising (p. 387 onwards) through the flux of Wilfrid's consciousness. The technique is a striking experiment Meredith made with time, and is also a notable feature of his kinship with twentieth-century novelists.

The next step from this pre-occupation with psychological measuring

of time is Meredith's achievement of timelessness through his presentations of the "epiphany", that is, the highly intensified moment of a sudden spiritual perception, carved out of the general flow of time.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, being a poet by temperament, he was impatient with sheer, external realism and as such with external time; since the epiphany is a very poetic vision somewhat akin to the mystical, it must have held a great attraction for him. Even in the instance we noted above from *Vittoria*, Wilfrid achieves something like an epiphany when he realizes the stark flow of time devoid of any external signs, time that is timeless in its flow, while he feels himself "under the pressure of hideous featureless Time" (p.382). Diana's "night watch", also mentioned before, by arresting time out of its ordinary movement (esp. see p. 220), also gives the inkling of an epiphany. However, these are imperfect instances in comparison with Meredith's representative achievements of epiphanic timelessness, of which I shall give three illustrations.

It is noticeable that even from his first novel Meredith started achieving the timeless moment and therefore I shall logically cite my first instance from *Richard Feverel*.<sup>21</sup> This is the scene of Richard's and Lucy's marriage, continued from the last part of chapter XXIX to the first part of chapter XXX (pp. 299-303). The scene stands prominent in the pitting of timelessness against the ruthlessness of the passage of time. Significant as the crowning of Richard's and also Lucy's anticipation of it (chs. XXVII-XXIX), it is an expression of their feeling of the elemental moment where their hopes are consummated. The effect is created first through references to time which are often imagistic, and through which even the marriage-vow takes on a particular significance. The bride and the groom are "asked to fix all time to the moment" (p. 299). "Firstly the bridegroom tells forth *his words*. *This hour.. at least is his, and that he means to hold him bound through the eternities, men may hear.....* Time hears sentence pronounced on him", and "the frail hands bind his huge limbs and lock the chains" (p. 300). "Time", Lucy feels, "is to be taken by the throat" (p. 302), and while Richard fumbles for the ring which he has lost, "Time ominously shakes his chain" (p. 301). This sense of timelessness is supported by the narration of this scene in what is sometimes a clumsy device but here serves its purpose, that is, the historic present which carries the sense of a continuous, timeless action which is raised above the level of the ordinary run of events (pp.299-302).

The next and more characteristic instance is from *Lord Ormont* (1891.) This is the famous swimming-scene of chapter XXVII (pp.319-25), where Matthew and Aminta swim together in the sea, the former making

a bid to escape from Lord Ormont. It is a scene of ecstasy, where the two consummately recapture their old and lost love. At first the mood is conveyed through symbolism, the swimming standing for their act of leaving the conventions of society ("land") :

The swim was a holiday ; all was new—nothing came to her as the same old thing since she took her plunge ; she had a sea-mind—had left her earth mind ashore ....(p. 320).

The swim, in its "delirium" of joy, thus effects a "magical" transformation of her mind, which happens also to Matthew (*ibid.*), so that they shake off their conventionalities ; as they swim parallel to one another as comrades they declare their love which is revived across the period of their separation a long while ago (pp. 320-22). The time of the swim is thus a unique, eternal time different from the usual time marked by obedience to customs and conventions.<sup>82</sup> But apart from these implications, the timeless quality is directly brought out in the bits of dialogue in terms of time between the two :

.....  
We've said, adieu to land. Not to one another. We shall be friends.

'Always.'

'This is going to last ?'

'Ever so long.' (p. 322 italics mine.)

And later,

'Try to beguile me then, that our holiday's not over. You won't forget *this hour* ?'

'No time of mine on earth will live so *brightly* for me.' (p. 324, italics mine.)

For one thing, this sense of "ever so long" and the "unforgettability" of the "brightest time" pervades the scene through its poetry, and produces the effect of the timelessness of the particular moment. But this is not all, and the "epiphany" is further achieved in a heightened manner in another part of their conversation in which they address each other as "Browny" and "Matey", their love-names in school-days. Their present, adult identities as Aminta and Matthew thus drop off, as they re-live their school-days in their ecstasy in terms of the symbolic associations, of these days (p. 321). Finally, the epiphany rises to a climax in Aminta's interior monologue, "Was he unaware that they were boy and girl again ?—she washed pure of the intervening years, new born by blessing of the sea" (p. 323, italics mine). The images are obvious, and require no explanation.

The most striking instance of Meredith's achievement of the eternal

moment is in an internal monologue, one of the most powerful not only in Meredith's novels but in all fiction. This occurs in the "expiation"-scene at Mrs. Burman's chamber in *One of Our Conquerors* (ch.XL).<sup>22</sup> Here the awareness of time arrives at its most intense stage near the end of the first year of the novel. Confronting the dying Mrs. Burman, his "destiny", Victor is choked with his feelings, and the situation ponderously continues for ten suspense-packed minutes, determined by Victor's acute sense of the slow passage of time :

More than a minute of the terrible length of the period of torture had gone : two, if not three.

\* \* \*

Another minute must have gone in the silence.

\* \* \*

They were certainly now on the five minutes. (pp.487-88)

As, thus, Victor keeps counting the time minute by minute, Mrs. Burman starts a prayer, and after that, suddenly, in a moment of reverie, time ceases to be, and images of timelessness re-incarnate his past life through his memory :

It [ the prayer ] acted on him like the silent spell of service in a Church. *He forgot his estimate of the minute*, he formed a prayer, *he refused to hear the Cupid* [ Mrs. Burman's clock ] *swinging*, he droned a sound of sentences to deaden his ears. *Ideas of eternity rolled in semblance of enormous clouds...* The gold and white of the chairs welcomed a youth suddenly enrolled among the wealthy by an enamoured old lady. Cupid tickticked.. Plunging through a wave of the scent of Marechale, that was a tremendous memory to haul him backward and forward, he beheld his prayer dancing across the furniture ; By merely looking at Nataly, he passed into her prayer. A look at Mrs. Burman made it personal, his own... ( pp. 488-89, italics mine. )

Thus indeed time conquers itself in the perfect moment of timelessness which strongly resembles the Joycean epiphany and Virginia Woolf's "moments of being". We understand this best by noting what we may call the vertical journey of time, that runs across the horizontal chronology. True to the nature of an epiphany, the moment carries the entire pressure of Victor's past, through which he has been tensely waiting for his release from Mrs. Burman and counting time. Even since he was twenty years old, he has been climbing in Society, planning his release ( see e. g., p. 32 ) ; for the past one year ( immediately previous to the first year of the novel ; see, e.g., p. 14 ), he has been maturing his scheme for release ; in the course of the present year he has been furthering it

gradually towards the anticipated climax ( as the action of the novel upto the present chapter shows ) ; for the past forty-five minutes, since quarter to three on this Sunday in April ( pp. 483-86 ), he has been preparing himself for the final show-down with Mrs. Burman ; for the past five minutes, he has been going through the ordeal of his life-time and counting the agonized minutes : then, in this sudden moment of revelation, release comes not only from Mrs. Burman but also from the tyranny of time and external barriers. Now he forgets the estimate of minutes, his life-long habit, as his being is submerged into the consciousness of eternity. The ten past four on April Sunday thus becomes the zero-hour of his entire spiritual life.<sup>23</sup>

## V

Several points have to be stated for the necessary summing-up. That the starting point of this discussion of Meredith's handling of time has had to be chronology, stems from the fact that he is lodged in the solid, fictional tradition established by Fielding and Richardson. At the same time, however, he remarkably anticipates the treatment of time, as we have seen, of later novelists like Conrad, James, and Joyce—as a matter of fact, heavily leaning towards them. Then, the vast range of his time-scale is no doubt indicated by the function of time in his novels, often intermingling with one another : organic chronology, continuity, modulation, time-shift, manipulation of the time-locus, experiential colouring of chronology, timelessness—the range will be further extended if we remember the poetic symbolism implicit in all this. Finally, what is most important, this impressive array of functions are not to be mistaken as mechanical tools or ends-in-themselves. They are as we have seen, vital means of controlling as well as awakening the reader's response to the subject-matter of his stories and quite often part of the subject-matter as well. Surely, this rhetorical function of time in his novels has a more than ordinary appeal for the twentieth-century sensibility.

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. *The Rise of the Novel*, Penguin Books, 1963, p. 23.
2. Some other instances of chronology in Meredith's novels are indicated in the later pages ; apart from them, the following can also be mentioned : *Diana of the Crossways* (1885), e.g., pp. 44-5, 50, 84, 93, 161, 168, 169, 211, 212, 237, 247, 260, 269, 306, 307, 336, 352, 432, 436, 457, 492—seven-odd years ; *The Amazing Marriage* (1895), e.g., pp. 11, 14, 41, 132, 134, 237, 268, 272, 282, 298, 349, 351, 353—nearly nine years, prefaced by a panoramic twenty-four years.
3. *Aspects of the Novel*, London, 1958, p. 31.

4. Thus A.A. Mendilow refers to this as "texture" in respect of James and Proust (*Time and the Novel*, London, 1952 p. 73), and J.W. Beach to the late nineteenth-century use of this in Dostoevsky (*The Twentieth Century Novel*, New York, 1932, p. 160.)

5. This, and other instances given in this essay disprove Beach's contention that in this type of continuity Dostoevsky has no parallel before Joyce (*ibid.*) ; Beach does not mention Meredith.

6. More instances will be incidentally seen in course of the discussion in the following pages.

7. Some other characteristic instances of continuous days and day—"suites" are as follows : *Beauchamp's Career* (1875), pp. 51-68 (one day), 68-92 (two days), 205-238 (three days), 444-84 (one day), 527-47 (one day) ; *Diana*, pp. 94-138 (one day), 212-28 (one day) ; *The Amazing Marriage*, pp. 87-138 (two and a half days), 193-209 (about one and a half days), 210-28 (three days), 319-47 (two days.) In the discussion of time in *The Egoist*, *One of Our Conquerors*, and *Vittoria* below, many more interesting instances are to be found.

8. This is how the eight days are presented : (1) pp. 146-71, (2) pp. 171-234, (3) pp. 243-76, (4) pp. 287-94, (5) pp. 295-386, (6) pp. 386-496, (7) pp. 496-613, (8) pp. 613-25. For the points where the days merge into the next ones, see pp. 171, 243, 287, 294, 386, 496, 613.

9. I have explained and indicated these eleven "structures" in my essay, "Time and Continuity in Meredith's *One of Our Conquerors*", *Bulletin of the Department of English*, Calcutta University, NS, 11, 2, 1966-67, pp. 54-5, 62-3.

10. This may be interestingly contrasted with the "looking forward" of the ending of *Vanity Fair*.

11. *The Amazing Marriage* offers another very remarkable instance of continuity, though of a different type.

12. Which usually goes unnoticed in critics' emphasis on the historical 1848.

13. The chronologies of *The Egoist* and *One of Our Conquerors*, mentioned above, show more examples of modulation.

14. For various other examples of chronological upsetting, see *Evan Harrington*, chs. XLIV, XLV, XLVI (esp. pp. 548, 558, 559-60, 562, 563) ; *Sandra Belloni* (1864), chs. XXVII, XXVIII, XXIX (see esp. pp. 278, 288, 289, 290) ; chs. XXXII, XXXIII, XXXIV (esp. pp. 331, 333-47, 348-49) ; *The Egoist*, chs. I, II, III (esp. pp. 10, 16, 17, 21-3, 25) ; chs. XL, XLI (esp. 482, 494) ; chs. XXXIV, XLII (esp. pp. 480, 511-12, 513-14, 514-24) ; *Diana*, chs. XXXII-XXXIII (esp. pp. 368-75, 375-77) ; *One of Our Conquerors*, chs. V-VI, VII (esp. pp. 58, 71) ; chs. XX (pp. 229-37), XXI-XXII (esp. pp. 238, 242) : chs. XXXI-XXXIV, XXXV (esp. pp. 414, also p. 412) ; *Lord Ormonde* (1892), pp. 197-203, 203-5 ; chs. XIX, XX (esp. pp. 229-38, 238-42) : *The Amazing Marriage*, pp. 185-228 (esp. p. 185.)

15. I borrow this term from Mendilow, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

16. E. g., pp. 192, 216, 263-64, 265-66.

17. Whereby one sees that the gap between the narrative time-points of chs. IV and VI is less than a week.

18. Several other instances of various kinds of manipulation of time-locus are as follows : *Richard Feverel*, pp. 1, 10; *Vittoria*, pp. 626, 627-28 ; pp. 95, 203, 278, 329, 341, 443-46 ; *Harry Richmond*, pp. 197-200 ; *Diana*, ch. I (esp. p. 1), II ; *One*

of our Conquerors, pp. 403-8, 438-40 : *The Amazing Marriage*, chs. I-III (esp. pp. 32-3), IV.

19. See Mendilow, *op cit*, p.64 for these terms.

20. For a good exposition of the epiphanic moment in fiction, I would refer to Georgio Melchiori. "The Moment as a Time-unit in Modern Fiction", *Essays in Criticism*, III(1953), pp. 434-46, and Leon Edel, *The Psychological Novel, 1900-1950*, London, 1961, p.95.

21. I should like to point out that a possible influence of the epiphanies of *Richard Feverel* on the Joycean epiphany is suggested by Ellsworth Mason and Richard Ellman in *The Critical Writings of James Joyce*, London, 1959, p.88.

22. I have briefly discussed this moment as well as the earlier instance of chronological looping in this novel, in my essay on *One of Our Conquerors*, *op.cit.*, pp. 54-6.

23. This no doubt resembles the Joycean epiphany and Virginia Woolf's "moments of being", of course in its own way. Among many other instances of Meredith's epiphanies, the following can be mentioned : *Richard Feverel*, p. 120 ; pp. 153,154, also p.166 ; p.171, p. 523 ; p. 551 : *Sandra Belloni*, p. 200 ; *Vittoria*, pp. 318-19 : p. 183 ; *Chloe* (*Memorial ed*, XXI), pp. 9-10 ; *Lord Ormont*, p. 292.

# GEORGE BERNARD SHAW : A REVIEW

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BISHNUPADA BERA

*Back to G.B.S.*, an extravaganza by E. M. Barling, was broadcast at the Malvern Festival on 15 November 1932. It has a characteristic situation. The Shade of Shaw says to the Shade of Shakespeare : "I won the cap and bells of a fool, and jested and jested to make men hear me. I bade them search a quip for the truth behind it, but they laughed at the bitter truth, and were dumbly respectful to the jest."<sup>1</sup> This is but an echo of what George Bernard Shaw himself wrote to Florence Farr on January 28, 1892 : "It is by jingling the bell of a jester's cap that I, like Heine, make people listen to me."<sup>2</sup> Both the extravaganza and the letter to Farr point to the same thing—the dramatic device adopted by George Bernard Shaw to reach the people. George Bernard Shaw was the greatest comic dramatic artist since Moliere. Armed with the rapier of wit and Puckish humour he had presented a panoramic satire on contemporary society by writing plays on the principles of rationalism and critical rebellion. As the greatest critic of his age, he pitched his dramatic aspirations very high. "Either I shall be remembered as a playwright as long as Aristophanes and rank with Shakespeare and Moliere, or I shall be forgotten clown before the end of the century,"<sup>3</sup> he observed, when he refused the Order of Merit, offered by the Labour Government. His dream came true. He won recognition as a "world-dramatist"<sup>4</sup>; and in this he shared with Ibsen the romance of a fairy-tale fate. He emerged from obscurity by "sheer gravitation" and fought his way to fame as a world-famous playwright. A study of his evolution as a dramatic artist and thinker should, therefore, be significant.

The only son and the youngest child of George Carr Shaw, George Bernard Shaw was born in Dublin on July 26, 1856. Himself a "downstart and the son of a downstart" (*Prefaces*, p. 659), he showed no promise as a student. Even as a child he cared little for the conventional mode of teaching; he would enrich his mind in his own way. He had an absorbing passion for music and painting. His boyhood dream was to be a painter or an opera singer. He would be found prowling in the Dublin National Gallery to study the masterpieces of the old masters. Music, the other strong pull in his nature, was in his blood, as the Shaws were a "musical family" (*Prefaces*, p. 661). The musical atmosphere at home, maintained by his mother and her teacher, G. J. Lee, fed his passion for music, which was

to play a significant role in his later life—as a musical critic and as a playwright, in whose operatic approach to plays the “music of ideas”<sup>5</sup> was the golden thread running through all. In fact, Shaw himself declared that he learned his art from the masters of a universal language—Bach, Handel, Mozart, Beethoven, and Wagner.”<sup>6</sup> In his boyhood the other sides of his questioning mind were also duly attended to. He learnt French history from the novels of Alexandre Dumas *pere* and English history from Shakespeare and Walter Scott. Though he profited little by what the school professed to teach, he was “highly educated” in his own way; for he “could sing and whistle from end to end leading works by Handel, Hayden, Mozart, Beethoven, Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti and Verdi” and he was “saturated with English literature, from Shakespeare and Bunyan to Byron and Dickens.” (*Prefaces*, p. 858). At the same time he was susceptible to the beauty of nature.

Thus Bernard Shaw equipped himself mentally and intellectually. Two other things associated with his boyhood offer a clue to the understanding of his character. The Shaws “did not bother about conventionalities or sentimentalities”. (*Prefaces*, p. 661). So Bernard Shaw from his boyhood came to be unsentimental and defiant of social conventions. His uncle Walter, “an artist in his obscenity and blasphemy” (*Prefaces*, p. 667) spoke of holy things with utmost levity. This worked on his mind and destroyed his “inculcated childish reverence for the verbiage of religion, for its legends and personifications and parables”. (*Prefaces*, p. 667). All these combined to encourage his “youthful and very irritating system of contradicting everyone,” (*Prefaces*, p. 679) from whom he thought he could learn anything.

Schooling ended, Bernard Shaw, with his mind stored with varied ideas and impressions, thought of earning something at thirteen or thereabouts. He sought employment in a cloth merchant’s firm in Dublin, but he was found “too young” for the post. A year later or thereabouts he was appointed an “office boy” in the Valuation Office, Dublin and he worked at the Desk for four years and a half. Though he was promoted to the post of the Cashier of the firm, the nature of the work did not suit his independent temperament. So he threw up the appointment in March, 1876, and migrated to London, the land of Shakespeare, whom he “had unconsciously resolved to reincarnate” (*Prefaces*, p. 660) from his cradle.

In London where his mother and sister had been turning their musical attainments to account; he remained dependent on his mother’s income till 1885, when his “penury phase was over” (*Prefaces*, p. 676). Though “an unemployable,” he ghosted for Lee as a musical critic for *The Hornet* in 1876 till its death in October, 1877. The year 1879 is a finger-post in his

life. This year dates the beginning of his career as a novelist. *Immaturity*, his first novel, was written between March 1879 and 28 September 1879. The second important incident of the year was his acquaintance with James Lecky, who made him a member of the Zetetical Society. Subsequently, Shaw became a member of the Dialectical Society. To get over his initial shyness and nervousness he actively participated in debates on all subjects. The dialectical skill, thus acquired, was of great use to him in writing discussion dramas as a playwright. The third incident of the year was his appointment in the Way Leave Department of the Edison Telephone Company in November, 1879. This company, however, was swallowed up by the Bell Telephone Company on June 1, 1880; whereupon his "career as a commercial employee" came to a close. He could not devote himself entirely to literary pursuits. The four other novels of his "nonage" came in rapid succession—*The Irrational Knot* (1880), *Love Among the Artists* (1881), *Cashel Byron's Profession* (1882), and *An Unsocial Socialist* (1883). He had no success as a novelist. No publisher in London and America would venture on his novels in view of his "hostility to respectable Victorian thought and Society". (*Prefaces*, p. 676).

While constant refusals forced him into "a fierce self-sufficiency", some formative influences were at work on his mind. In 1881 he came under the influence of Shelley and became a vegetarian. On 5 September he heard Henry George, the author of *Progress and Poverty* (1879), lecture on the necessity of nationalising the land. This speech "was a revelation" and it changed the whole course of his life. The influence of Henry George on Shaw remained unabated, till he read the French translation of Karl Marx's *Das Kapital* in the British Museum. Here in the winter of 1882-83,<sup>8</sup> he met William Archer who subsequently became his life-long friend and exerted the deepest influence on his career by pointing the direction in which his genius lay. Bernard Shaw himself acknowledged his indebtedness to William Archer in his Preface to *London Music 1888-90*. Referring to "the nine years of shabby genteel destitution during which" his "attempts to gain a footing in literature were a complete and apparently hopeless failure" (*Prefaces*, p. 852), Shaw observed: "I was rescued from this condition by William Archer, who transferred some of his book reviewing work to me, and pushed me into a post as picture critic which had been pushed on him, and for which he considered himself unqualified, as in fact he was. So, as reviewer for the old *Pall Mall Gazette* and picture critic for Edmund Yates's then fashionable weekly *The World*, I carried on until I found an opening which I can explain only by describing the musical side of my childhood which was of cardinal importance in my education." (*Prefaces*, p. 852).

The reference here is to his appointment as musical critic for *The Star* (1888-90) over the pseudonym Corno di Bassetto. He was now in his element. So, from 1890-94 he remained the musical critic for *The World* and his profound knowledge of music astounded all concerned. In the capacity of dramatic critic for *The Saturday Review* (1895-98) Bernard Shaw was a breaker of idols, quite in keeping with his crusade for Ibsen and his intellectual drive for the newest form of approach to things—a mission to which he pledged himself for setting the British theatre in tune with the intellectual movement abroad.

It would be significant to note here that the two major influences on Bernard Shaw in the eighteen-nineties besides William Archer, were Karl Marx and Henrik Ibsen. "Karl Marx made a man of me"<sup>9</sup> Shaw declared on his seventieth birth-day. In fact, a study of *Das Kapital* convinced him of the economic basis of society and this conviction remained a potent influence throughout his career as a playwright. Shaw himself observed : "In all my plays my economic studies have played as important a part as a knowledge of anatomy does in the works of Michael Angelo."<sup>10</sup> Ibsen exerted as deep an influence on Shaw as Marx and Wagner. Janet Achurch's performance of *A Doll's House* on June 7, 1889, left so profound an impression on Shaw's mind that commenting on the far-reaching significance of Nora's daring he observed : "The slam of the door behind her is more momentous than the cannon of Waterloo or Sedan"<sup>11</sup>; but the novelty of the play "as a morally original study of a marriage did not stagger" him "as it staggered Europe" (*Prefaces*, p. 689) and "shell-shocked"<sup>12</sup> his British contemporaries ; for he had already been "taken far outside the bounds of middle-class idealism"<sup>13</sup> by Karl Marx. He "rejoiced in it, and watched the ruin and havoc it made among the idols and temples of the idealists as a young correspondent watches the bombardment of the unhealthy quarters of a city".<sup>14</sup> It should be noted here that Shaw wrote a prose sequel to *A Doll's House* under the caption "Still after the Doll's House" which appeared in *Time*, February, 1890. Shaw delivered an illuminating address before the Fabian Society on 18 July 1890. This was published in 1891 as *The Quininessence of Ibsenism* which formed, in reality, a prelude to his own dramatic career, opening with the premiere of *Widowers' Houses* on 9 December 1892 at the Royalty Theatre.

It was William Archer who turned Shaw's genius to playwriting. William Archer was "a born constructor", while Shaw's dialogue was "incomparable". The two friends, therefore, agreed to collaborate in writing a comedy on condition that Archer would furnish the plot and Shaw, the dialogue. Archer "drew out, scene by scene, the scheme of a twaddling cup-and-saucer comedy vaguely suggested by Augier's *Ceinture Doree*."

After about six weeks Shaw said to Archer, "Look here, I've written half the first act of that comedy, and I've used up all your plot. Now I want some more to go on with". (*Prefaces*, p. 699). Shaw had written the play in his own way ; this upset Archer's plan. On his failure to furnish fresh plot, the collaboration ended; but Shaw finished the drama in his own way. Such is the genesis of *Widowers' Houses*, which was produced by J. T. Grein at the Royalty Theatre.

As early as 1881 when Shaw wrote *Love Among the Artists*, a novel with a purpose, he felt that "his destiny was to educate London";<sup>15</sup> but in the eighties he was simply groping for an adequate means of self-expression. With the production of *Widowers' Houses*, however, he found himself. He came to pin his faith on the theatre as a "social organ" (*Prefaces*, p. 731) and the most effective means of forcing "the public to reconsider its morals" (*Prefaces*, p. 410). By using "shock tactics"<sup>16</sup> he resolved to open the eyes of the self-complacent British people to reality, stripped of the veils of romance and illusion. "I can no longer be satisfied", he declared, "with fictitious morals and fictitious good conduct, shedding fictitious glory on robbery, starvation, disease, crime, drink, war, cruelty, cupidity, and all the other commonplaces of civilization which drive men to the theatre to make foolish pretences that such things are progress, science, morals, religion, patriotism, imperial supremacy, national greatness and all the other names the newspapers call them" (*Prefaces*, p. 734). He would make the people think in order "to bring them to conviction of sin" (*Prefaces*, p. 150); he would make the readers uncomfortable by directing his attacks against them and not against his "stage figures" (*Prefaces*, p. 727), so that the audience and the readers alike might "feel like guilty creatures sitting at a play". Thus his thoroughly revolutionary approach to life made each of his plays a distinct challenge to time-honoured conventions, as he handled questions on various issues—"slum-landlordism, doctrinaire Free Love (pseudo-Ibsenism), prostitution, militarism, marriage, history, current politics, natural Christianity, national and individual character, paradoxes of conventional society, husband-hunting, questions of conscience, professional delusions and impostures". (*Prefaces*, p. 545).

Thus *Widowers' Houses* is "a grotesquely realistic exposure of slum landlordism" (*Prefaces*, p. 719) and *The Philanderer* (1893), of "the grotesque sexual compacts made between men and women". (*Prefaces*, p. 726). In *Mrs. Warren's Profession* (1894) he drew attention to the appalling truth that "prostitution is caused, not by female depravity and male licentiousness, but simply by underpaying, undervaluing and overworking women so shamefully that the poorest of them are forced to resort to prostitution to keep body and soul together." (*Prefaces* p. 219).

These satiric plays were published as *Plays Unpleasant*, because "their dramatic power is used to force the spectator to face unpleasant facts." (*Prefaces*, p.726). The next four plays—*Arms and the Man* (1894), *Candida* (1894), *The Man of Destiny* (1895) and *You Never Can Tell* (1896) were labelled *Plays Pleasant*, because they deal "less with crimes of society, and more with its romantic follies and with the struggles of individuals against these follies". (*Prefaces*, p.727). In *Arms and the Man*, an anti-romantic comedy, the romantic ideas of love and heroism are laughed to scorn. *Candida* envisages a new order of society in which "the bread-winner acknowledges his dependence"<sup>17</sup> on the lady of the house. *The Man of Destiny* is a comedy about Napoleon. *You Never Can Tell*, a drawing-room comedy, indicates the irresistible working of the Life Force, as Gloria puts it : "As if Nature, after letting us belong to ourselves and do what we judge right and reasonable for all these years, were suddenly lifting her great hand to take us—her two little children—by the scruffs of our little necks, and use us, in spite of ourselves, for her own purposes, in her own way, (Act II).

Bernard Shaw then published *Three Plays for Puritans : The Devil's Disciple* (1896), *Caesar and Cleopatra* (1897) and *Captain Brassbound's Conversion* (1898). They were so labelled, because the author sedulously excluded from the plays the element of sensuousness "which was at once the fetish and the stock-in-trade of plays churned out for the commercial theatre."<sup>18</sup> The turn of the century marked the beginning of a period of Shaw's great creativity which established him as a premier British dramatist. It should be significant to note here that Ibsen, who had dominated the British stage in the 'nineties, went out of fashion by 1902, as noted by the *Daily Telegraph* : "It is a curious, and in a sense, significant fact that Ibsen's works have of late completely disappeared from the stage."<sup>19</sup> This was so because the new theatre had transferred its allegiance to the new master of British drama, George Bernard Shaw. This accounts for Shaw's immense popularity, dating from the Barker-Vedrenne management of the Court Theatre (1904-7), during which 11 of Shaw's plays were given 701 performances.

In the first decade of the new century Shaw's plays came in dazzling succession. *Admirable Bashville* (1900) is a dramatized version of his popular novel, *Cashel Byron's Profession* in blank verse. *Man and Superman* (1901-3) shows how at the suggestion of A.B. Walkley Shaw turned the legend of Don Juan into a parable of Creative Evolution. *John Bull's Other Island* (1904) is a play on the question of Irish Home Rule, showing a contrast between Irish dreams and English philistine efficiency. *How He Lied to Her Husband* (1904) is a little piece of farce

and the first of Shaw's plays to be filmed. *Major Barbara* (1905), an anti-romantic thrust at the traditional concept of philanthropy and meliorism, is, in effect, a plea for the abolition of poverty as the greatest curse on mankind. *The Doctor's Dilemma* (1906) is a satire on medical profession and discusses the relative merits of a gifted artist without moral scruples and a mediocre good man. *Getting Married* (1908) is a non-stop discussion on marriage from all points of view, conventional and unconventional, religious and secular. *The Shewing up of Blanco Posnet* (1909), is a melodrama, showing man's place in God's plan of creation. *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets* (1910) is a plea for the Shakespeare National Memorial Theatre. *Misalliance* (1910) is a long debate on the relations between parents and children.

Shaw's dramatic creativity remained unabated till 1949. In 1911 was produced *Fanny's First Play*, a pot-boiler and a trenchant satire on middle-class respectability, as Shaw himself observed : "I hate to see dead people walking about: it is unnatural. And our respectable middle-class people are all as dead as mutton." (*Prefaces*, p. 138). *OVERRULED* (1912) is a farce on marital infidelity, calling upon men and women to fit their moral codes to their nature. *Androcles and the Lion* (1912), a "fable play" and a comedy on saintliness, preaches the deepest truths of religion through Ferrovius's acts to meet an emergency. In *Pygmalion* (1912) the story of Pygmalion and Galatea is retold in modern terms to show that the differences in speech are in a large measure responsible for the superficial class distinctions, because a flower girl, if properly trained in speech, may easily be passed off as a Duchess. The other remarkable play of Shaw in the second decade of the century is *Heartbreak House* (1919), a "Fantasia" in the manner of Tchekhov's *Cherry Orchard* and *Uncle Vanya*. It is a comedy of social disruption which pictures England on the eve of the First World War as a ship drifting on the rocks, because the skipper "lies drinking on his bunk and trusts to Providence" (Act III)—a predicament in which the knowledge of navigation is the one thing needful to avert the disaster. This play was succeeded by *Back to Methuselah* (1921), Shaw's second parable of Creative Evolution, divided into five distinct sections—(a) In the Beginning (b) The Gospel of Brothers Barnabas (c) The Thing Happens (d) The Tragedy of Elderly Gentlemen (e) As Far As Thought Can Reach.

Though by this time Shaw's reputation as a playwright had been established, it is the production of *Saint Joan* (1923), Shaw's most popular and most appealing "chronicle play", which won him recognition as a World-dramatist. The year 1926 firmly sealed his world renown with the award of the Nobel 'Prize for Literature. His dramatic powers, however, were now on the wane. "My sands are running out", Shaw wrote at the end

of the Preface to *Back to Methuselah*. *Saint Joan* was perhaps the last bright flicker of the dying lamp. All his dramas from 1929 to 1949 may be classified as the "dramas of dotage"<sup>30</sup> and have little of the unbearable glare of the dramas of his prime. In 1929 was produced *The Apple Cart*, a political extravaganza, in which he upset the apple cart of democracy and royalty. This play was succeeded by two other political extravaganzas—*Too True to be Good* (1932) and *On the Rocks* (1933). In 1934 was produced *The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isle*, Shaw's third parable of the Creative Evolution, in which "an investigation of our personal social values" for the "liquidation" of "the social nuisance" (*Prefaces*, p. 642) is urged. *The Millionairess* (1936) suggests that it is personal dash alone to take chance and venture into the unknown which raises a man from obscurity to eminence. In *Cymbeline Refinished* (1937) Shaw rewrote the last act of *Cymbeline* in Shakespeare's verse pattern "as Shakespeare might have written it if he had been post-Ibsen and post-Shaw instead of post-Marlowe" (*Prefaces*, p. 870). The plays that followed are *Geneva* (1938), a satire on the League of Nations; *In Good King Charles's Days* (1939), a "true history that never happened"; *Buoyant Billions*, a comedy of manners (1947); *Far Fetched Fables*; *Shakes versus Shaw*, a puppet play (1949). Shaw's last dramatic writing, *Why She Would Not*, was an unfinished scenario, because Death rang the curtain down upon his most eventful career on November 2, 1950.

Bernard Shaw was the greatest intellectual and moral force in modern drama since Ibsen, and as such it should be significant to review, in brief, his peculiarities as a dramatic artist and thinker. It is the voice of Shaw that ring clear when Aubrey says: "I am by nature and destiny a preacher ..I must find the way of life, for myself and all of us ..I must preach and preach and preach no matter how late the hour and how short the day, no matter whether I have nothing to say".<sup>31</sup> It is Shaw's profession of dramatic creed. Shaw really found "the way of life" for the British people by shocking them out of their dangerous self-conceit and their conventional, hide-bound ways of thinking. "It annoys me to see people comfortable when they ought to be uncomfortable" (*Prefaces*, p. 150), he said. He therefore, forced them to wake up to their social responsibilities. He took the theatre as a battering ram to shatter the emotional basis of the western civilization. He sought to convert the nation to his ways of thinking by showing things up and he found in comedy the most effectual means of destroying old-fashioned morals. So, it was, he says, as Punch that he emerged from obscurity. He first caught the ear of the British people as "a natural-born mountebank" (*Prefaces*, p. 744), as a demagogue. "The cart and trumpet for me", (*Prefaces*, p. 745) he asserted. His experience

as a public speaker had convinced him that the people would most relish the sugar-coated pills. To tell the bitterest truths with impunity he, therefore, was "ambitious for a motley coat".<sup>23</sup> He explained his method in his own way: "In order to get a hearing it was necessary for me to obtain the footing of a privileged lunatic, with the licence of a jester. My method is to take the utmost trouble to find the right thing to say, and then to say it with the utmost levity."<sup>24</sup> His "way of joking" was "to tell the truth"<sup>25</sup> and when he told the bitterest truth as in *Common Sense about War* he was simply taken as a funny man, joking in his usual way.

To shock men out of the old grooves of thought Shaw laid seige to the bastilles of conventional morals. "If I make you laugh at yourself", Shaw declared, "remember that my business as a classic writer of comedies is 'to chasten morals with ridicule'; and if I sometimes make you feel like a fool, remember that I have by the same action cured your folly, just as the dentist cures your toothache by pulling out your tooth. And I never do it without giving you plenty of laughing gas."<sup>26</sup> In his comic methods he was at once a follower of Aristophanes and of Moliere. "Master, shall I begin the usual jokes. That the audience always laugh at"—these opening lines of *The Frogs* show the comic method of Aristophanes, whom Shaw appears to have followed not only in his method of joking but also in the characteristic conversational form and plotlessness of his comedies.<sup>27</sup> Moliere's influence upon his dramatic methods appears to have been more profound, as he himself admits, "Moliere's technique and mine is the technique of the circus, with its ring master discussing the topics of the day with the clown."<sup>28</sup>

Shaw discarded the "well made play" formula and showed his aversion for a "plot-play", though many of his plays were constructed musically rather than mechanically. He wrote "comedies of manners in the classic fashion", as he admitted in preface to *Back to Methuselah*. Two reasons are available for his preference for the classic fashion, "I find that the surest way to startle the world with daring innovations and originalities," explained Shaw, "is to do exactly what playwrights have been doing for thousands of years; to revive the ancient attraction of long rhetorical speeches; to stick closely to the methods of Moliere; and to lift characters bodily out of the pages of Charles Dickens."<sup>29</sup> Secondly, he wrote in the classical manner for those who paid for admission to the theatre, because they liked "classical comedy or tragedy for its own sake", and if well done, they would "stand in queues outside the theatre door for hours beforehand in bitingly cold weather to secure a seat". (*Prefaces*, p. 633). He always cast his "plays in the ordinary practical comedy form in use at all the theatres" (*Prefaces*, p. 730)

—melodrama, opera and extravaganza, but the touch of his genius had transmuted them all when they appeared in the characteristic Shavian dress. It was, however, not primarily as a story-teller that he held his audience spell-bound ; it was the thought-content of his plays—the startlingly new approach to all ideas, the new wine he poured into old bottles—which lured them to his theatre of ideas in spite of the “siren sounds” of the fashionable theatres with only one subject for entertainment—“clandestine adultery” (*Prefaces*, p. 545). He had “no taste for what is called popular art, no respect for popular morality, no belief in popular religion, no admiration for popular heroics.” (*Prefaces*, p. 716). His plays were “built to induce, not voluptuous reverie but intellectual interest, not romantic rhapsody but humane concern.”<sup>29</sup> Thus critical realism, which formed the very essence of his plays, or the “truth-to-life” which underlay his dramas in spite of the conventions on the surface was his distinct contribution to the British theatre for an intellectual awakening in the eighteen-nineties. His subtle use of the methods of paradox and “surprise attack” for reducing to absurdity the conventional views of the wiseacres on life and its problems won him recognition as “the most extravagantly humorous paradoxer in London”. (*Prefaces*, p. 717).

As the father of the theatre of ideas in London, he fashioned a new form of unemotional, anti-romantic comedy—a comedy of ideas, of “purposeful laughter”, of intellectual conflict, debate and discussion. Of action in common parlance there is little or none in his plays; yet the interplay of ideas or animated discussion which characterizes his dramas is as exciting as the material action and the blood and thunder of the most boisterous of the comedies, then in vogue. Thus *Getting Married* and *Misalliance* are all talks ; yet they enjoyed immense popularity on the stage. Taking his cue from the finale of *A Doll's House* Shaw made discussion the soul of his dramas. In fact, the element of discussion so dominates his plays that these may be summed up as “interesting chats about things in general” (*Man and Superman*, Act III). All through his dramatic career Shaw was nothing other than a conversationalist. Lady Britomart says to Undershaft : “Stop making speeches, Andrew. This is not the place for them.” Undershaft’s reply is characteristic. “My dear, I have no other means of conveying my ideas.” (*Major Barbara*, Act III). Here Undershaft merely voices the feelings of Shaw himself.

It was by using his dialectical skill that Shaw sought to convert the nation to his ways of thinking on society and the theatre. He put out of countenance “the sweet-shop view of the theatre”. (*Prefaces*, p. 546). Reviewing the theatre of his days Shaw said to Archibald Henderson,

"Remember that the British theatre was forbidden to touch politics or religion, or to say a single word about sex. Crime and lust and horse-play, deprived of all moral significance or psychological analysis, were its only permitted alternatives to conventional romance."<sup>80</sup> Following the lead of Ibsen he built his plays not on "conventional ethics and romantic logic" (*Prefaces*, p 752) but on "a really scientific natural history" (*Prefaces*, p. 198) and discussed on the stage all the taboo subjects. "I am a specialist in immoral and heretical plays," (*Prefaces*, p.410) he boldly asserted. His persistent struggle was to force the public to think for "a transvaluation of all values".<sup>81</sup> It was the change of hearts that he ever desired.. "When a comedy is performed, it is nothing to me that the spectators laugh : any fool can make the audience laugh. I want to see how many of them, laughing or grave, are in the melting mood." (*Prefaces*, p. 733). As a prophet of the thinking theatre Shaw diverted the powers of the theatre to the services of the realistic imagination and changed the British theatre from "a place-of amusement" to "a place of edification" (*Prefaces*. p. 736)—a "factory of thought"<sup>82</sup>.

Shaw's attitude to the theatre was quite in keeping with his Puritan spirit. Shaw was a Puritan turned playwright. "I have, I think, always been a Puritan in my attitude towards Art," (*Prefaces*, p. 743) he used to observe. A "born iconoclast" as he professed himself to be, his Puritanical zeal in following the banner of life made him ruthless in his work of destruction of the dead mass of conventions. "It is an instinct with me", he once said, "to attack every idea which has been full grown for ten years, especially if it claims to be the foundation of all human society."<sup>83</sup> It is a pity, Undershaft argues; that the world "scraps its obsolete steam engines and dynamos," but "it wont scrap its old prejudices and its old moralities and its old religions and its old political constitutions." (*Major Barbara*, Act III). So the spirit of iconoclasm underlies Shaw's prefatory comment on *Fanny's First Play* : "...the young had better have their souls awakened by disgrace, capture by the police, and a month's hard labour, than drift along from their cradles to their graves doing what other people do for no other reason than that other people do it "

If Shaw played havoc with the British prejudices and false idols, he offered something positive too as an "artist-philosopher". "Though my trade is that of a playwright, my vocation is that of a prophet",<sup>84</sup> he used to say. As a dramatist of the future, he preached his gospel of the Creative Evolution in terms of which the universe is God in the act or evolving Himself, using an instrument till it serves His purpose and scrapping it

when it loses its utility or can be superseded by a better one. The idea finds its best expression in *Shewing up of Blanco Posnet*. "You bet He didnt make us for nothing ; and He wouldnt have made us at all if He could have done His work without us. By Gum, that must be what we're for ! He'd never have made us to be rotten drunken blackguards like me, and good-for-nothing rips like Feemy. He made me because He had a job for me. He let me run loose till the job was ready ; and then I had to come along and do it, hanging or no hanging". Shaw identifies God with the Life Force which underlies finer and ever finer creation, as Don Juan puts it : "I tell you that as long as I can conceive something better than myself I cannot be easy unless I am striving to bring it into existence or clearing the way for it. That is the Law of my life. That is the working within me of Life's incessant aspiration to higher organization, wider, deeper, intenser self-consciousness and clearer self-understanding". (*Man and Superman*, Act III). This actuates "the philosophic man ; who seeks in contemplation to discover the inner will of the world, in invention to discover the means of fulfilling that will and in action to do that will by the so-discovered means." (*Man and Superman*, Act III).

It was Shaw's moral and intellectual passion, as indicated in his gospel of the Life Force which made him fulminate against the shams and lies upon which the respectability of the British middle classes was founded. This made him discover the way of salvation and preach it to the world till he handed the spiritual torch of life on to the future generations. To elucidate his startlingly new ideas Shaw supplemented the inner argumentation of his plays by an external comment in the elaborate prefaces which, in themselves, form a complete sociological literature on contemporary society. From a comprehensive study of Shaw the conviction grows that in spite of his preoccupations with preaching and propaganda and in spite of the fact that the want of dramatic aloofness made many of his characters the dummies of a ventriloquist, Shaw was essentially a theatre-wise artist, who "was at home only in the realm of" his "imagination", and at his "ease only with the mighty dead". (*Prefaces*, p. 680).

Shaw was a dramatist on whom the influences of master minds were at work. "I am a crow who have followed many ploughs", (*Prefaces*, p. 753) he confessed. Shaw, however, transformed these influences so completely that no one could find them in their original states. The idea has been beautifully expressed by Frank Harris : "His thinking was a broth, stewed by an Irishman, of the most varied schools of thought, chiefly from Schopenhauer, Strindberg, Butler, Bergson, Morris, and Nietzsche, Marx, Tolstoy, Ibsen and Wagner."<sup>85</sup>

With his mind so enriched, Shaw could say with placid self-confidence,

"I shall be a panjandrum of literature for the next three hundred years"<sup>36</sup> and it is needless to mention here that he secured a place in the Pantheon for his services to the British theatre. It was he who effected the full flowering of the English Dramatic Renaissance in the Eighteen-Nineties. The British theatre as he found it was nothing but dross ; the Midas touch of his dramatic genius transmuted it by linking it with life, religion, philosophy and literature. He edified the theatre, widened the scope of the drama, and intellectualized the audience by insisting on a "pit of philosophers" in place of a crowd of pleasure seekers, keen on meretricious entertainments. Thus Shaw marked the culmination of the dramatic and intellectual movement which Ibsen had set afoot in the continent. It was he who popularized Ibsen in England by placing him above Shakespeare. Ibsen was "the God of his early idolatry"<sup>37</sup> and influenced his dramatic career profoundly.

Shaw used to assert, "I owe nothing to Ibsen", though he was "a perfect Ibsenite in drama." It is after the inauguration of the Malvern Festival in 1932, however, that Shaw's blanket confession on the question Ibsen's influence on himself came Miss Blanche Patch records a conversation :

And "Nonsense!", he exclaimed when they wanted to set up a Shaw Memorial Theatre at Malvern. "Even among the playwrights I was not the only pebble on the beach. I am only one of Ibsen's Ghosts."<sup>38</sup>

"I am only one of Ibsen's Ghosts"—this open avowal by Shaw on the question of his indebtedness to Ibsen, his "dramatic deity"<sup>40</sup>, explains why his dramatic works are replete with Ibsenian ideas, beliefs and situations. *Widowers' Houses* betrays the influence of *Pillars of Society*. *Philanderer* "turns Ibsen out."<sup>41</sup> *Mrs Warren's Profession* shows preeminently the influence of *Ghosts* and *A Doll's House*. *Candida* is a debated drama of *A Doll's House* type, offering striking similarities with *The Lady from the Sea*, *Love's Comedy*, *Peer Gynt* and *Brand* in ideas and situations. The influence of *Peer Gynt* is discernible in *Caesar and Cleopatra* and *John Bull's Other Island*. *Man and Superman* is reminiscent of *Emperor and Galilean*, *Peer Gynt*, *Love's Comedy* and *When We Dead Awaken*. Ibsen is directly mentioned in *Misalliance*, *Fanny's First Play*, and *Back to Methuselah*. *The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isle* bears the impress of *Peer Gynt*. *Cymbeline Refinished* has been written by Shaw in the Ibsenian spirit.

Shaw's adoption of the Ibsenian technique accounts for his use of Ibsen's technical innovations, his use of the retrospective technique in *Mrs Warren's Profession*, his use of Ibsen's sit-down technique in the majority of his plays, his use of the Ibsenian method of

elaborate stage directions in fixing up the atmosphere and the tone of the play, and his use of Ibsen's discussion method in his own characteristic way. It shows, further, that Shaw has learnt from Ibsen how to fuse comedy and tragedy into a composite whole, to adjust his plays to the conditions of the picture-frame stage and to relieve intellectual stress by means of scenic and picturesque effects.

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Paul Hamlyn edition of *The Complete Prefaces of Bernard Shaw* has been followed in this essay.

# BROWNINGIANA

(*Notes on some Browning Poems*)

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AMALENDU BOSE

## *My Last Duchess*

Recently, a Delhi scholar asked me the meaning of "I gave commands", (1.45) : his question is, "commands" to whom ?—to the Duchess or to assassins ?

This is how I have always understood the poem.

The Duke is a representative, almost a symbol, of a certain aspect of the Italian Renaissance, the aspect that has been associated with the Florentine Borgias and Machiavelli's *Il Prince*. (Let us remember that Machiavelli's Model Ruler was based on Alessandro Borgia. Let us also remember that dissertations on the personality of the Model Ruler was not confined to Italy ; we have examples in England—following the necessity for the Model Benevolent Despot during the Tudor period—in Roger Ascham's and Sir Thomas Elyot's books, although the English models do not share the personal morality or the reverse of it of the Borgias). In the Italian Renaissance temper, qualities that may strike readers of soft and psychologically unstable sensibilities as mutually incompatible, coexisted easily. Thus, great aesthetic and intellectual abilities, on the one hand, and utterly ruthless personal conduct, on the other, could be seamlessly present in the same personality. Consider the personality of the Duke of the poem from this point of view ; aristocratically suave and urbane to the tip of his fingers ; a master of diplomatic speech (innuendo, under-statement, double implications) as well as of language charged with poetry :

"The depth and passion of its earnest glance"

"the faint/Half-flush that dies along her throat"

"The dropping of the daylight in the West"

a man whose controlled anger and caste-pride are cloaked in a tone of shifting nuances.

It is this complex of opposite qualities that Browning brings out in the character of the Duke. To state it briefly, the man is a lover of art while the husband is cruel.

In the context of such a character, does it seem plausible that the commands would be addressed to the Duchess, as though the husband had

said, "Now, my lady the Duchess, I command you not to smile", and the lady ceased to smile ? Besides, the word is *commands*, not the singular number. I suggest that the crux of the matter is to be found in the second clause of the sentence in the poem :

This grew ; I gave commands ;

Then all smiles stopped together.

There she stands *As if alive.*

( italics mine )

The woman's natural habit (or, one doesn't know, it might as well be a growing coquetry, although 'habit' fits in better with her personality) *grew*. Her husband, the Duke, hated her habit. Why ? Because this woman, in her native and constant geniality, failed to realise which object or experience properly merited her duchessly smile and which did not. She, a woman lacking in aristocratic discrimination, smiled when her husband gave her a brooch or a locket ("My favour at her breast") and smiled with equal geniality when some officious fool broke a twig of cherry-blossoms for her. This was intolerable to the Duke. Here was a woman, a duchess, who couldn't discriminate between thing and thing, an inability that showed up her lack of a sense of values that was essential to a person of her station in life. The husband could have remonstrated. Many other husbands would probably have done so, but, for this husband-Duke, the inheritor of a nine-hundred year old name, remonstrance was incompatible with his sense of dignity :

Who'd stoop to blame

This sort of trifling ?

( italics mine )

E'en then would be some stooping ;

and I choose Never to stoop.

( italics mine )

No, he couldn't stoop. (Let us also note the absolutely authoritarian phrase, "I choose never to stoop.) Meanwhile, *This grew*, there was no abatement to her habit of smiling. Therefore the only recourse open to the Duke was to stop her smiles. "Then all smiles stopped together." This total cessation of smiles would be possible only when the smiler was put irrevocably beyond the possibility of any smile, i. e., when the duchess was killed by one of the numerous assassination techniques of the sixteenth century by a hired assassin or by a group of assassins. (Burckhart's *Civilisation of the Renaissance of Italy*, p. 30, mentions the cruelty of the House of Este, and John D. Rea in a Note on this poem, *Studies in Philology*, 1932, pp. 120-22, convincingly traces the source of this poem to the personal history of Vespasiano Gonzaga, Duke of Sabbioneta, who had his first wife Diana murdered because of her liveliness.) The commands issued by Browning's Duke were the commands issued to the hired assassins. That she was killed, that on the occasion of this monologue, the woman

is dead, is diabolically suggested in the contrast of the two sentences : "Then all smiles stopped together" and "There she stands as if alive." It is not possible for the reader to fail to notice the malevolent implications of the sequential relationship between the stopping of smiles and the woman's being no longer alive now.

At this point, it is necessary to refer to a statement of Browning himself on the matter. Hiram Corson, an American professor, asked the poet the meaning of the lines we are considering. The poet said : "the commands were that she should be put to death,...or he might have had her shut up in a convent." I find the second alternative quite unacceptable. First, the woman's confinement in a convent would not justify the expression "all smiles stopped together"; she would no longer find any opportunity to smile at officious fools but the confinement could not clamp down on her a total cessation of smiles. Second, this interpretation blunts the edge of the innuendo in the juxtaposed sentences,

"All smiles stopped together" and "There she stands as if alive."

In the journalistic phraseology of today, the Duchess was liquidated and not sent to a concentration camp.

### *Pippa Passes*

(A) No Browning scholar hitherto has indicated any source for any part of *Pippa Passes*. W. C. DeVane, *A Browning Handbook*, p. 87, makes the categorical statement that "Properly speaking there are no sources for *Pippa Passes* beyond the observation and imagination of Robert Browning." Without doubt, the topography of the poem-drama is that of Asolo and its pervasive spirit is that of the lambent chiaroscuro characteristic of Italy although, at times, a typically English suggestion is pushed in, as for example when Pippa's song in Part II beginning "Give her but a least excuse to love me!" mentions "Kate the Queen", giving a homely English stamp to the royal name of Queen Caterina Cornaro, ex-queen of Cyprus, who had lived in Asolo for some years.

To the best of my knowledge, no one seems to have noticed the high relevance of a Swinburne-letter in regard to the question of sources of *Pippa Passes*. This is what Swinburne wrote to Lord Morley on 13 February, 1876 :

If Browning did not consciously steal, and unconsciously and unconscionably spoil in the stealing, the episode of Jules the sculptor's marriage in "Pippa Passes" from the "Histoire de MMe. de la Pommeraye et du Marquis des Arcis" in *Jacques le Fataliste*, then all incredible coincidences must henceforth be held credible. The minute I saw the gist of Diderot's story I recognised the

admirable original of a decidedly unadmirable copy. As the work of a slighted woman's revenge, the conception seems to me most terribly and almost grandly natural; as the device of a male crew of jealous rival artists, absurdly false and repulsive by reason of its absurdity.

(*Letters of A. C. Swinburne*, ed. T. J. Wise and Edmund Gosse, I, 272)

Though Browning was very well read in French, curiously, there is no evidence to suggest that he had any special fancy for Diderot. The Encyclopaedists made no dent on his mind and art. The name of Diderot does not figure in Griffin and Mainchin's careful biography nor in Mrs Orr's *Life and Letters of Robert Browning*; the name does not occur in the *Letters* edited by T. L. Hood or the letters to Isabella Blagden edited by Edward C. McAleer. The name is mentioned once in the *Browning Love Letters*, i, 114 where the mention is meant to be, though in effect it is not, witty with a slant at Diderot's philosophy; this mention, dated June-July, 1845, is close to *Pippa Passes*, composed in 1840 and published the next year.

Swinburne overstates the coincidence. The fable of some persons conspiring to cheat a man in a marriage is an old one and an English author need not go further than Ben Jonson in search of such a fable. What is significant in the use of such a fable is the particular slant that has been given to it. In Browning's story of Jules and Phene, the three elements that are characteristically his own are: (i) the malice, irresponsibility and cruelty that prompt the students of art to conspire against the struggling Jules; (ii) the conclusive reversal of the dramatic situation that is wrought unconsciously by the unconcerned personality of Pippa, and (iii) the beautiful vision of escape by the two lovers to "some unsuspected isle in far-off seas", so representative of the *zeitgeist* throughout the Victorian period and so remote from Diderot's way of thinking.

Swinburne noticed (i), but failed to realise its significance.

### *My Star*

First published in the *Men and Women* volume in 1855, this lyric was afterwards transferred to the *Dramatic Lyrics* volume. The date of composition is not known but W. C. DeVane (*Handbook*, p. 202) suggests the days in Italy after the poet's marriage.

I suggest an earlier date, earlier than the poet's marriage.

That star imagery are frequent in Browning's poetry and deeply significant has been noticed by most sensitive readers of Browning, and we also

have Wellard Smith's laborious treatise on the subject. But 'star' as an image-symbol of subjective significance grows apace from the time of the poet's courtship and the lines in this poem

My star that dartles the red and the blue !

Then it stops like a bird ; like a flower, hangs furled :

They must solace themselves with the Saturn above it.

may be chronologically linked with the following lines from a letter written to Elizabeth Barrett on July 18, 1845 :

... as I see by the law of my own star, my own particular star, the star I was born under, the star *Wormwood* ... on the opposite sides of the heavens from the constellations of the Lyre and the Crown.

*(Browning Love Letters, I, 130)*

### *Love in a Life*

First published in the *Men and Women* volume, 1855. This poem too, DeVane thinks, is a product of Browning's married life in Italy. I suggest an earlier date, April 1846, on the following evidence. A sentence from a letter to Elizabeth, dated April 6, 1846, goes thus :

In this House of Life .. where I go, you go . where I ascend  
you run before ... when I descend it is after you.

*(Browning Love Letters, II, 37)*

In the poem, this idea is repeated :

Escape me ?

Never—

Beloved !

While I am I, and you are you,

So long as the world contains us both.

Me the loving and you the loth,

While the one eludes, must the other pursue.

The companion-piece, *Love in a Life*, repeats the idea of the sentence in the letter :

Room after room,

I hunt the house through

We inhabit together.

The two poems and the letter, built on the same idea and similar language, are chronologically linked.

Incidentally, the phrase "house of life" anticipates the title of D.G. Rossetti's sonnet-sequence.

### *The Mellon-Seller*

First published in *Dramatic Idylls*, 1879. No source has been found

or conjectured for this poem. I find the source in the following letter of the poet to Elizabeth Barrett, post-mark August 6, 1846 :

How strange—and a few weeks ago I read, in the same paper [The Times] a letter from Constantinople—wherein the writer had mentioned that he had seen (I think, that morning) Pacha somebody, whose malpractices had just drawn on him the Sultan's vengeance, and who had been left with barely his life,—having lost his immense treasures, palaces and garden etc. along with his dignity,—the writer saw this old man selling slices of melon on a bridge in the city; and on stopping in wonderment to praise such constancy, the Turk asked him with at least equal astonishment, whether it was not fitter to praise Allah who had leant him such wealth for forty years, than to repine that he had judged right to recall it now?

(*Browning Love Letters*, II, 405)

That it was Browning's habit to store up a subject for a long time is attested by William Rossetti :

He seldom or never, unless in quite brief poems, feels the inspiring impulse and sets the thing down into words at the same time—often stores up a subject long before he writes it.

(*Rossetti Papers*, 302)